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BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

Out of some cold figures, came a story to warm America's heart

NOT LONG AGO, the Secretary of the United States Treasury studied a figure-covered sheet of paper.

The figures revealed a steady, powerful upswing in the sale of U. S. Savings Bonds, and an equally steady decrease in Bond redemptions.

But to the Secretary, they revealed a good deal more than that, and Mr. Snyder spoke his mind:

"After the Victory Loan, sales of U. S. Savings Bonds went down—redemptions went up. And that was only natural and human.

"It was natural and human—but it was also dangerous. For suppose this trend had continued. Suppose that, in this period of reconversion, some 80 million Americans had decided not only to stop saving, but to spend the $40 billion which they had *already* put aside in Series E, F & G Savings Bonds. The picture which *that* conjures up is not a pretty one!

"But the trend did NOT continue.

"Early last fall, the magazines of this country—nearly a thousand of them, acting together—started an advertising campaign on Bonds. This, added to the continuing support of other media and advertisers, gave the American people the facts . . . told them why it was important to buy and hold U. S. Savings Bonds.

"The figures on this sheet tell how the American people responded—and mighty good reading it makes.

"Once more, it has been clearly proved that when you give Americans the facts, you can then ask them for action—and *you'll get it!*"

What do the figures show?

On Mr. Snyder's sheet were some very interesting figures.

They showed that sales of Savings Bonds went from $494 million in last September to $519 million in October and kept climbing steadily until, in January of this year, they reached a new postwar high: **In January, 1947, Americans put nearly a billion dollars in Savings Bonds. And that trend is continuing.**

In the same way, redemptions have been going just as steadily downward. Here, too, the trend continues.

Moreover, there has been, since the first of the year, an increase not only in the volume of Bonds bought through Payroll Savings, but in the number of buyers.

How about you?

The figures show that millions of Americans have realized this fact: there is no safer, surer way on earth to get the things you want than by buying U. S. Savings Bonds regularly.

They are the safest investment in the world. Buy them regularly through the Payroll Plan, or ask your banker about the Bond-a-Month Plan.

Save the easy, automatic way—with U.S. Savings Bonds

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THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show* you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. *Use the coupon below* and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

Scribe NVZ The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

Name.....

Address.....State.....

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NOVEMBER 1947

All Features Complete

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Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Lamp of Vengeance."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WELL maybe you think we haven't got a terrific lineup this issue after the top-notchers you read last month. Well, all we can say is—you're wrong! Take a look at our cover story for instance. "The Lamp Of Vengeance" by Berkeley Livingston. You've been after Berk to do a novel length yarn for some time, and here he is, with a story that will really satisfy you. It's all about a man who had a certain lamp, a lamp that gave him the power to rule over all mankind. And in the hands of this certain man—whose name you know quite well but we'll leave you to find that out for yourself—it turned out to be what its name implied: a lamp of vengeance. We think that Berk, who is one of your great favorites, has written a truly fine story. And, we might add that the cover, painted around the story, is something slightly terrific too. Robert Gibson Jones can really handle a brush!

JOHN and Dorothy de Courcy are back this month too with another fine short story. This time, with "Come Into My Garden." It's one of those short fantasy tales that keep you reading and guessing right to the last line. The story concerns a young woman who sees a blue rose garden—in her mind. At least, that's what the doctors said. So in order to prove to them that she really did see it, she invited them to take a look for themselves. And that's all we'll say.

WHENEVER we mention Chet Geier's name you know you're in for some first-class reading enjoyment. This month, Chet is back with a short story, entitled, "Time Out Of Mind." In it, Chet tells about a man who wanted to remain young. And he found a way by shutting out the rest of the world from his mind. It seemed like a logical thing to do, and it actually worked out that way. Until one day—but there we have to stop. You'll find out for yourself what happened when you read the story. We think you'll like it.

AT THIS point you can sit back and purr. You know, like the cat that has just finished off the cream. What we mean is that "Toffee" is back. Yep, the little hellion herself, in what we think is by far the best story Charles Myers has yet written around her. This time "Toffee" finds herself in a peculiar position. Being what almost amounts to a ghost herself, she suddenly finds a real one staring her in the face. And to make matters worse, this particular ghost talks, acts, and looks like her own favorite male—Marc Pillsworth. We might say that Marc too finds it very distressing, especially when—but as usual we nearly spilled the beans. Anyway, you've got some rib-tickling reading waiting for you when you turn to page 108.

RICHARD CASEY returns this month also with a neat fantasy yarn called, "The Miracle Of Herbert Plunk." It seems that Herbert, just a shy country lad, came to the big city looking for big things to happen. As a matter of fact, he was looking for miracles. And, as he soon found out, miracles *did* happen. And as everyone else found out, the reason they happened was because Herbert Plunk *made* them happen. A very peculiar chap, this Herbert . . . and a very good writer, this Casey.

FINISHING up this issue, Lee Francis returns with a short story entitled, "Hell Is A Circle." This is as unique a fantasy twist as we've seen in many a moon. It's all about a man who receives punishment from a *higher power*. And a very odd sort of punishment it is. The whole thing started off at breakfast with a missing bottle of milk. That was the beginning, but not the end. In summing up the situation mathematically you might say that if heaven is a straight line and the shortest distance between two points, then hell is a circle . . .

WE WERE quite interested in the flood of mail that came in from you readers after you read von Cosel's "The Secret Of Elena's Tomb." Some of those letters—really only a few as we didn't have room for any more—appear in the Reader's section. We'll say one thing, the story really aroused your interest!

NEXT month, as we promised you, J. W. Pelkie's new "Toka" novel will appear. We've all been waiting for a long time for another story of the further adventures of "Toka", and at last it is here. There's another swell cover by Bob Jones too, which is really something to see. It was painted around a scene in the novel, and Bob did a terrific job. Then of course you'll be seeing a lot of your favorites like William P. McGivern, Chester S. Geier, Berkeley Livingston, Lee Francis, Richard Casey, and many others. So we'll be seeing you next month.....W.L.H.

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The Lamp of Vengeance

by BERKELY LIVINGSTON

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Satan was sure of his power over mankind—for he alone knew the secret of the Flame Lamp . . .

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HE WALKED with a slight stoop, as if the weight of his upper body was too much for him. His head, which was unadorned, was thrust forward, as if it was seeking something, and the long thin line of his neck was like a bird's, wrinkled, loose and somehow giving the impression of many-jointedness.

The fog, which had come with the dying of the day's sun, had grown thicker, more soup-like, and the street lights threw a weird glow, as if seen through a long series of window panes. The street was deserted and was like a narrow funnel of darkness melting into greying darkness. But the man walked with an odd confidence, as if an inner light was lending illumination to his steps.

The man came to an intersection and for an instant he hesitated, though a passerby would only have taken the pause as natural, what with the fog and the chance of a car making a quick turn. But the same passer-by could not possibly interpret the very audible *sniffling* sound the man made. Nor would he have made sense of the words, muttered in a low undertone:

"Not far, now. The scent lingers in the moist air."

ROBERT Bruce drew the collar of his topcoat up around his throat. He shivered, and though the air was chilly, it was not alone the cold which made him tremble. There was that note in his pocket; he could feel the grained texture of the paper against his sweating palm. What devil from out of the past, had come to plague him, was the thought in his mind? It was all so long ago. How had *they* found him?

A ghost cab, its fenders dripping moisture, sloshed to a halt at the curb. Bruce opened the door, slid into a badly-cushioned seat and said:

"164 North Wabash."

The cabbie, an elderly man wearing gold-rimmed glasses, turned away and ground the gears into play. Bruce saw a semi-profile of greying stubble, an angular chin, bushy grizzled eyebrows and a thick nose. Then the face turned away and Bruce was alone with his thoughts again.

The letter had come in the afternoon mail. It had borne a Loop cancellation although there was no return address. The envelope was quite plain and of cheap paper, but when he ripped it open he saw the letter had been typed on excellent rag-content stationery. He started to pull the letter out, but the hand didn't come all the way. There was no need for it. He knew what the letter said. The words lay deep in his mind:

"The *Lamp* never dies. The maker of the Flame has need of his servant. Do not fail to heed the summons! Tonight, at eight. We await thee. . . ."

No more. Just that and the address.

BRUCE shook his head with a fierce strong gesture. The jutting line of his chin settled into more granite firmness and the slate-grey eyes became agate-hard. Bruce had a heavy, muscular face. It was best described as being, "carved, as if from stone." Right now the simile seemed perfect. Not a muscle quivered. The flesh lay firm against the bony structure. But in all the tiny cells of his brain, turmoil raged.

Twenty years ago, he thought. It was like twenty centuries ago! The high hard mass of basalt and the waves beating against it. And there, high on the craggy mass of rock, was the great arched refuge. He could see the robed figures, silent-treading, head bent forward in a stoop, coming from the niches

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of their individual sanctuaries, making for the central hall. He started nervously, as a deep-noted sound came to his ears, and for an instant he thought it was the summons of the great gong in the belfry. But it was only his mind playing him a trick.

"Here we are, sir," the cabbie said.

"Huh?" Bruce said stupidly.

"164 Wabash," the cabbie said in a tired voice. The fare hadn't looked drunk. But it was hard to tell with these old-timers. He hoped he wasn't going to have any trouble. That jerk last night . . . There was a case. Boy!

"Oh!" Enlightenment came into Bruce's voice. "Right! How much?"

"Forty-five."

"Keep it," Bruce said, handing the man a dollar.

"Thanks!"

But Bruce was already on his way toward the dimly-lighted lobby. The night-damp folded him into its clammy clasp and made his bones ache as though with pain. His tall, strong figure bent a little in a slight stoop as he stepped forward. There was the sound of meshing gears; then the street held only the figure of Robert Bruce moving toward the rectangle of dim light in the lobby. And in a second that too was gone.

Bruce ran his fingers down the lines of white names on the black background and stopped at the words, Aijan Machin, Lamp Makers. The room number was 2233.

He signed his name and the hour in the night-man's book and waited for the elevator. The operator had lost his youth several generations before from his appearance. Even his voice was old, faded and querulous.

Bruce was his only passenger and the operator pushed the stool out, made himself comfortable and observed that the weather was, "Lousy outside, eh?"

"Yeah!" Bruce's reply was abrupt and to the point.

But the other was in a mood for talk. He made no effort to close the doors. He shifted the wad of gum to the other cheek and peered up at his passenger.

"Come nights like these," he said, "and an elevator man's job stinks. 'Specially when he's on nights. 'Tain't bad days . . . a guy gets a chance to see people. But nights like this—Stinks!"

A thought came to Bruce. He put it into words:

"Yes, I imagine it is a lonely life. Not many people use their offices at night, eh?"

"There's some buildin's what do an' some what don't. This is one of those what don't. Oh, now an' then there's some who come up for a couple of hours. Usually got a woman with 'em. Reminds me of the time one of those fancy Dan's thought I was a bell-boy or somethin'. Wanted me to chase out and get him some whiskey an' ice. I told that lad off pretty good, I did . . ."

Bruce leaned back against the metal side and felt sorry he had brought the subject up. Then something brought him erect:

" . . . Gotta admit that lamp outfit comes in regular, though. Usually has eight, ten customers. Like tonight. I'll bet I've taken at least twenty men up there. Even a couple of women. Must be doin' a right smart piece of business up there. Well, guess you're goin' to ride alone. Floor?"

"Twenty-two," Bruce said.

The operator gave him a quick, sidewise look, but said nothing. He pulled the lever over and the car started.

It was a plain door, frosted for its top half with two neat rows of letters, the top giving the name of the firm and the lower, the name, Aijan Machin. Bruce waited until he heard the elevator start downward before knocking.

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He became aware of his quickened breathing as he waited for an answer to his summons. He let it out in a shallow sigh as the door opened softly and slowly and he saw a wide room at the far end of which was a semi-circular desk of a rich looking mahogany color. There were a couple of leather seats along the wall to his left; the angle of the door cut off all vision of what the right side of the room held. He also caught a glimpse of a water color above two of the chairs. Then a voice said:

"Won't you come in?"

It was a young voice, a woman's. It was a trifle brusque as though its owner was not in the habit of waiting for things. Bruce stepped further into the office, turned and surveyed the woman standing with one hand on the door knob. He made a mental note that the organization was doing much better these days. The women they employed were certainly lovelier and of better physical charm than in the old days.

ROBERT BRUCE was known for many qualities. The least of these because he made little effort to show charm, was the warmth of his affection. Mona Lavy noticed, before her eyes took in the rest of the six-foot figure standing, head bowed slightly, eyes quirked in amused glance, that this man had a physical impact on the senses. It was strange, she thought, that she should become warm so suddenly. Was it his eyes, his superb figure or some odd quality . . .?

"Thank you," Bruce said. "I will."

"I'm Mona Lavy," Mona said. "And you?"

"Robert Bruce."

"How nice. Sounds like a sweater . . ."

"Yes. Scotch plaid. The others . . . ?" Bruce looked inquisitively toward the closed stained door at the far end of the room.

"Of course," Mona said severely. "You're the last. Aijan asked me to admit you."

"*Aijan*," Bruce said, rolling the name over his tongue as though there was an odd flavor to it. "Odd. Frankly, I must admit to have never known him."

"I don't think it matters," she said. "The point is he knows you. Well," she sighed, "I hate waiting for things. And I'm glad that you came along at last. Frankly I was about to give you another three minutes . . ."

"Then?" Bruce asked.

"The door would have been closed."

"Surely some one else would have answered to my knock," Bruce said smiling.

"That is a problematical something to which I don't happen to have the answer," the girl said, and turning on a smart-looking trim ankle, started for the inner door.

Bruce took two quick steps and was at her side before she quite reached it. It was his hand which went to the knob.

"Allow me, this time," he said.

She turned eyes which were warm sparks of blue fire up to him. He smiled down into them. He became aware of the closeness of her, realized that her body was mature, that her figure was a thing of beauty beneath the black jersey of her blouse, that his breath had subtly quickened . . . and opened the door before he gave way to the terrific impulse to kiss her.

He caught the murmur of voices just as he opened the door. But as the two stepped into the room there was only silence to greet them. He brought a smile to the surface, looked about the room and as the girl moved to one of two chairs which stood side by side before a narrow short platform, fol-

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lowed her and took the empty one beside her.

It seemed that he saw nothing, so shallow was his glance, but that single glance catalogued the room and its contents, people and props. There were a half dozen wall lights, shallow lights in wall brackets. On the stage there was only a deep arm chair, beside which stood a pair of incense standards. Smoke curled from them. His nostrils quivered and memory brought back the same smell. The smile remained but his eyes narrowed a trifle. There were two rows of chairs arranged in a semi-circle before the stage. There were twelve chairs in each row, the *sacred twelve*, Bruce remembered. There were only three women present so he knew there were twenty-one men. But of the one called Aijan Machin, Bruce saw nothing.

"Heavens!" a voice said in exasperation. "Are you that slow about everything? Sit down, man!"

IT was Mona and she was looking up at him with fury in her eyes. He saw that her hands were clenched in her lap.

His sitting down was as a signal. For suddenly the lights in the wall brackets went out, and hidden lights on the stage went on. And seemingly from nowhere, a man stepped out of the darkness from the right. He was on the small side, neatly put together, well-dressed in dark, clean fitting suit, white shirt and dark tie. He had a small, narrow head and the features were almost feminine in the proportion to the rest of the face. He walked quickly to the chair, sat down, brought his fingers up in an arch in front of his eyes and began speaking:

"Tonight, friends, I have summoned you to come to me. I am glad that there was no one who heeded me not . . ."

The words, or rather their presentation, sounded a familiar strain to Bruce. He waited for the rest.

". . . For surely that one would have missed the message of the," there was a pause, *"Lamp!"* He brought the word out in odd fervor.

And as he spoke the word, there came a collective gasp from the audience. For though Aijan's appearance was odd, it was explainable. The appearance of the man who now stood by his side was mysterious in the extreme.

Bruce found himself breathing softly, shallowly, through parted lips. The Servant of the Lamp! He hadn't seen him in almost twenty years . . .

The man on the stage was robed in a blood-red cowled robe. The face was hidden in the folds of the cowl. He held one hand extended in front of him. A spear was held firmly in that hand. The blade of the spear was a full two feet in length, curved, gleaming steel, on which could be dimly seen odd characters. His left hand was held close to his body. In it there was a lamp of antique design that was more bowl than anything else. Smoke curled from the tiny spout. Suddenly the stranger raised the lamp on high. Like magic, a bright flame poured from its covered top.

"Bow! Bow before the might of the Lamp!" the Servant said in trumpet-like tones.

Bruce didn't want to. He *willed* himself not to. Yet, as though his action was automatic and beyond will or muscle control, his feet swept the chair back, and he went down to his hands and knees. Nor was he alone. So did everyone else there. Everyone, that is, but Mona. She turned her head back and forth, a startled look of bewilderment in her eyes.

". . . I am come from the Keeper of the Lamp," the hooded, cowled figure said in sonorous tones. "Hear and obey! The time has come for which we have waited. That is the message I bring.

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You will each of you wait for instructions. There is not one of you who knows not his duties. There is not one of you, but knows not the reason for his being here. Let you not forget why you have been instructed. Bow before the Lamp and the Flame, before knowledge and death! For the Flame and the Lamp is eternal and one without the other cannot be. Return ye to your places of being until the Servant of the Lamp calls again. The day approaches when what has been taught ye will be put to use. In darkness ye came: In darkness go . . ."

There was a weird sound, like that of wind whistling through the forest growth, like that of spirits wailing, and a great *swoosh,* as if a bird had passed in close flight. And with the passing of the giant bird, there came utter darkness! Then, from the throats of the kneeling men and women there came a great sobbing sound, and a single word:

"Aaiee!"

The spell passed for Robert Bruce. He stood, brushed his knees free of dust and looked about. There was a peace in his soul. Mona, who had a look of supreme stupefaction on her lovely features, looked not alone at the man at her side, but at all the rest who were now standing about. There were a hundred questions in her mind. But the one which pressed most closely to her consciousness, was:

"Why do I think they've been hypnotized?"

Yet that was precisely the outward appearance of them. There was that odd look of daze in their eyes. And as though they had all donned the same mask, there was a singleness of blankness in their faces.

The lights came on again. And it brought a return to normalcy at least. For the lights were the familiar glow from the wall brackets. She turned her head toward the stage. There was Aijan Machin sitting in the too-high chair for him. His head was bent forward, as though he was asleep. But he was not. For even as she wondered he lifted his head and spoke:

"We have heard the Servant. Let us leave now. There is no need for questions. For certainly there will come the moment when all our questions will be answered. Good night, friends . . ."

BUT there was a question Mona Lavy wanted answered. She wanted it answered then and there. Where was the robed, cowled figure? What had happened to him? She had to have the answer to those questions. For it was all too-apparent that the stage was now empty but for Machin.

Suddenly she realized that he was smiling directly at her. There was something strange in the smile, a quality of weirdness, and oddly, she couldn't put her finger on it. She knew, though, that she didn't like it. And turning, she looked about, as though for help.

"Wait," she whispered to Bruce, who had taken a few steps to the door.

Bruce turned at the word and looked inquiringly at her.

"Mind if I walk with you?" she asked.

"Come along," he said.

They were the last to leave the room. At the door to the outer office she linked arms with him. She pretended it was another reason, but deep within her she knew it was fear alone which had made her take his arm.

The fog had lifted somewhat, at least enough so that things could be distinguished in their proper lights. The rain had also ceased.

"Can I drop you somewhere?" Bruce asked.

She nodded but said nothing. Bruce looked sharply at her. When she said

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nothing to his question, he asked again:

"I'm taking a cab. I'm sure it won't be out of my way. May I . . . ?"

"Why not come up to my place?" she asked.

He did a double-take at the words. But her smile robbed the words of any implication he might have assumed. It was a smile of pure mischief.

"Why—why," he stuttered. "Er . . ."

"I thought you might like some coffee," she said. "And frankly, without too great an effort at boasting, I make the best coffee west of Brazil."

"I'd be delighted," he said. And turning, whistled up a cab.

SHE lived in a very modern five-room place on Cambridge Place on the near north side. She flicked the wall switch on and Bruce looked about in pleasure. For the most part he didn't like modern decor, but Mona's sense of the artistic, and feeling for proportion saved the apartment from being too much on the arty side. First modern place he'd seen, Bruce thought, that could be called homey.

"That armchair there," Mona said, pointing to a deep-pile chair, "is just meant for a man your size. Go ahead. Make yourself to home while I cook up a pot of mocha . . . Say!" she burst out suddenly.

"Yes?"

"How's for some sandwiches?"

"Why . . ." he seemed undecided.

"Swell," she took his indecision for acceptance. "I won't be long. Magazines are on the stand. Or if you prefer, the records are in that cabinet beside the combination. See you . . ."

The chair *was* comfortable, Bruce decided. He looked about with interest. There were a couple of Picassos on one wall and a Matisse on a second. The third held only a large water color of Aaron Bohrod's, a street scene. Below the water color was the center piece of a sectional sofa, an immense floral piece in yellow, grey and brown. A lawson sofa ran the width of one windowed-wall. One of the latest-type radio-phon. combinations took up a rather narrow wall. One of the two bedrooms was to the right of where he was sitting. The other was off the kitchen.

MONA had a catholic taste in magazines. *Fortune* lay cheek by jowl with *Reader's Digest*. The *New Yorker* and *Life* rubbed elbows. But the magazine which opened his eyes, was something called *Occulti*. Bruce lifted it from the stand and leafed through the pages. He saw most of it was standard stuff. He turned back to the editor's page and his eyes narrowed when he saw the name, Edward Conway Lavy. So that was why Mona's name had struck a familiar chord. She was Lavy's daughter.

"Just a couple more minutes," Mona called from the door leading to the kitchen.

He was so startled he dropped the magazine. She walked into the living room. Her eyes went to the *Occulti* magazine which was lying face uppermost.

"Yes, he was my father," she said. "No. Wait till I get things ready. Then we'll talk."

He lifted his shoulders in a shrug. She smiled at the gesture, turned and went back into the kitchen. He looked up at the ceiling and wondered why she had asked him to come. There were other questions at the back of his mind, but he was quite sure she hadn't the answers to those.

Once more the door swung open and this time she appeared with a loaded tray which she set on the coffee table Bruce dragged up before his chair. She

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kicked an Ottoman over so that she was sitting directly across from him.

"Eat," she directed. "Talk later. Besides, it's always better to talk on a full tummy."

She *did* brew a fine pot of coffee, Bruce thought at the first sip. And the sandwiches were filling, too. He sighed in sheer relaxation after he had drained the second cup.

"Now that's the way I like a man to eat," Mona said. "A woman always feels best if the compliment is practical instead of verbal. Really, though, you should try my roasts . . ."

"I'm quite sure that they are out of this world," Bruce said, interrupting. "However, I don't think you asked me here for the purpose of practicing the art of cooking on me."

"No? Why have I asked you up here, then?"

"I don't know," he said frankly. "I'd like to."

There was no immediate answer. First she reached into a section of the magazine stand and pulled out a glass cigarette case. Bruce lit the cigarette for her, watched her lips draw deeply at it, saw the wonderful grain of the skin, and sighed in wonder at her beauty.

"I'll tell you," she said after a second drag. "Not just yet, though. First, I want to hear all about you."

"Me? Why," he seemed at a loss for words . . .

"Go on. Who are you; what are you; and why were you asked to be at Machin's tonight?"

He leaned back and peered thoughtfully at her. He could well ask her the same things. Abruptly, he began:

"Name, Robert Bruce. Occupation, publisher, same as your late father. As for why I was asked to Machin's, I suppose for the same reason you were. To hear the Servant of the Lamp. I am puzzled though, why one so, so, well . . ."

"I know," she broke in. "One so beautiful . . ."

"I wasn't going to say that," he said. "*Young* was the word I would have used. Beauty and the Lamp are not synonymous. But *age* is. And you are much too young to have first-hand information about the Keeper of the Lamp. I can therefore suppose and correctly so, that your father told you of it. Still it does not explain your presence."

"All right," she said when he had stopped. "I'll come clean, as they say in the who-dun-its. You're quite right. My father told me something of a mission he had to perform. I knew all about the Lamp. That is all but how he and the rest came to be connected with it, you are going to tell me about it."

"Come now, Miss Lavy," Bruce said. "I'm afraid your bribe was far too small. Coffee and cakes . . . Look! Your father published *Occulti*. You must have known what it contained. Why ask me?"

"It contained nothing I can lay my hand on. Believe me. I have gone through that damned thing from cover to cover. Every last issue of it. Might as well have been done in Sanskrit for all I could get out of it. Hold it!" she stopped him short as he opened his mouth. "Maybe you don't read the papers. But I'm Mona Lester of the *Chronicle*. I'm the features reporter. That was why I was at the meeting."

"Because you're a reporter? Please, Miss Lavy. Let's not speak in riddles. Machin would not have dared to let a reporter in on anything like that. You came because like myself and everyone else, you had an invitation."

"A command, you mean," she said bitterly.

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"Any name will be right. You came though."

"I had to! I had to find out what was the mystery in my father's life."

"You mean you don't know . . .?"

"I SWEAR it! Wait. Let me explain. Let me tell you what I know about my father. I know he was an explorer. That in his youth, before he married my mother, he went to strange and far places. Then he returned from what he said was his last journey and married mom.

"He settled down in Chicago, started in the business of magazine publishing and lived quietly here. I was the only child they had. Now I know that my sex was a disappointment to my father. He wanted a boy. For the first fifteen years of my life I was raised as a girl. The strange part of my life began on my sixteenth birthday. And it continued till my father died, a year ago.

"He called me into his office that night; he liked to do his editorial work after mother and I went to bed, and said, 'Mona. It's time you learned the business.' To say I was startled would be to beg the situation. I was dumbfounded. What had I to do with the business of putting out a half dozen magazines? Yet that was precisely what he taught me. There was but one magazine with which I had nothing to do, *Occulti*."

"Of course you couldn't have," Bruce broke in.

She started to go on, then suddenly lifted startled eyes to meet his. "What do you mean?"

"*Occulti* was the written voice of the Lamp. And only those who knew where to look for the words could ever find them. Let's forget that for a moment. What I want to know is, why did they send a message to you?"

"Because I am my father's daughter. He said long ago, that what was his was mine, now and ever. But what is it that's his?"

Bruce laughed suddenly. It was a harsh sound of ridicule. Yet the girl felt that it was not ridicule directed at her but at him, her father.

"Listen, Mona!" Bruce grated through teeth set hard together. "You don't have to be in this. Forget it. Write your little special pieces about the forest preserve or the new mode in hats. Only forget what happened up there."

He stood suddenly and his legs slapped against the coffee table sending it against her. He didn't apologize for his action, but stepped aside and started for the door. She stopped him before he quite reached it:

"I don't care what you say. I'm going to get to the bottom of this, no matter what the cost."

"The cost is going to be darned high!" were his last words to her. The door closed on his broad back.

JASON, Bruce's man, was out. Bruce had told him to take the evening off. Jason had left a night light on for his master. Bruce kept up his appearance of the masterful man until the outside door closed behind him. Then his shoulders slumped in weariness and an unaccountable feeling of weakness possessed him so that he had to take hold of the balustrade for support. He shook the feeling off with a visible effort and started up the stairs.

And there was the jangle of the phone in the alcove next to the butler's pantry.

"Oh, damn!" Bruce exclaimed aloud. He had an idea it was the girl. He had a queer and suddenly overpowering desire to run from the house. But the phone kept ringing. And slowly his left foot came off the bottom step and

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he turned and made for the alcove.

"Hello! Hello!" he called into the mouthpiece.

The voice which answered was metallic, harsh, and sounded as if it came from a great distance.

"*Gamen* Bruce! *Gamen* Bruce. Hear and obey. Tonight you took the girl, the daughter of *Gamen* Lavy, home. She asked you certain questions. The Keeper of the Lamp is glad to know you gave no information she could use. Do not see her again. . . ."

"Why?" Bruce felt anger sweep over him in a tidal wave of hate.

"Because the Keeper of the Lamp does not wish you to."

"Why? *Why?*" Bruce only realized he was shouting when he heard Jason's voice behind him.

"Mister Bruce! Sir! Is there something wrong?"

The composed face of the servant was more grey than its wont, when Bruce turned and looked at the other with unseeing eyes.

"Why?" Bruce whispered to himself, as he walked by the other. Gone was the power in his face, the sureness of his bearing. Bruce looked like a broken man. His shoulders were slumped, his eyes dead, the muscles in his face sagged so that the flesh hung in folds, and his mouth hung loose, like an idiot's.

JASON felt a stirring of fear as he watched his master walk stumblingly up the curving staircase.

He looked at the clock on the dresser in his bedroom. Midnight. Four hours ago he had started for Machin's. Twenty years ago he had started for Machin's, was his thought. The years had caught up with him. He walked through the bedroom and opened the door to his study. He leaned back in the swivel chair by the desk, put his feet up on the leather of the desk and folded his hands on his belly. It was his favorite pose when thinking. And Robert Bruce was thinking stronger at this moment than he had ever thought before.

So, he thought, the moment has come. The moment which had begun for him twenty-odd years ago. Robert Bruce, successful publisher of books, magazines, periodicals. The delight of the book-sellers, the darling of the women's clubs, the pride of Directors' Club, where the art directors of Chicago met and discussed the latest in what went on covers and dust jackets. Only the day before he had brought out the newest darling, one Helmuth Jones, and the critics had raved over his book.

He shook his head free of the past and thought of the present, and the future.

The way had been paved for him. A cool million dollars had been provided for him. His brow wrinkled in remembrance of the words of the chamberlain, "There has been deposited in the Continental Trust Bank of Chicago, the sum of one million dollars. The money is yours. No accounting is necessary. The teachings of the Master will now be put to use . . ."

The million had grown to ten. Bruce Publications was one of the largest in the country. Its ramifications extended to all levels and influenced a great deal of the thinking in the country. Yet in all the years which had passed not a single word, not a single sign had come to him from beyond the *veil*. Oh, he knew of other *gamen,* Lavy for one, and a man named Gordon Chin. He had even met them, Chin was an influential member of Chicago's Chinatown. They had never discussed their past. He knew, now, that he would be seeing Chin soon.

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Well, he thought, no use in beating my brain silly in speculation. Might as well hit the hay . . .

Jason brought the second cup of coffee and a stranger with it.

"Excuse me, sir," Jason said. "This man is from the office. He said he has some important thing to tell you . . ."

Bruce looked up at the man. The stranger was quite tall, lean-looking, with a drawn face strongly marked and intelligent. He was wearing tweeds. There was a pipe in one hand and the other held a briefcase. The man nodded in Bruce's direction, looked about for a chair, and dropped into one Jason drew out.

"Finish your coffee," the man said casually. "I've time."

"Who are you?" Bruce asked, placing his cup carefully back in the saucer. Color rose redly in his face. This man didn't work for him.

"I have a message here for you," the man said, tapping the case. "Important. Triple A priority, y'know. Stuff that can't wait."

Bruce looked steadily into the other's eyes. The conviction that this was the message he had been waiting for, rose in his breast. He shook his head for Jason to leave.

"Join me?" he asked the stranger.

"No, thanks. I had an early breakfast."

"Well, I'm through. Come up to the study," Bruce said.

Bruce had to admire the other's ease. The stranger sat, one leg drawn over the other, and regarded Bruce with an amused glance. He dropped the case by his leg, rubbed his palms together as though in anticipation, and reached down and unzippered the bag.

Bruce's eyebrows rose when he saw what the man brought from the case. There was no question about what it was, a manuscript.

"No darned good trying to get to you in your office," the stranger said. "That secretary of yours is a holy terror to us poor, starving authors. I thought I was pretty good getting to the inner sanctum. But I didn't think it, too, would be guarded. Holy sacred whitefish bellies! How the heck does a man get to sell his script to you?"

BRUCE hid a grin behind a broad palm. He felt a wave of relief sweep over him. This chap was an author! Maybe it was a good thing he came along. Perhaps the tension would leave him now?

"Through the regular channels," Bruce said. "Or have you tried those?"

"Tried! My dear Mister Bruce, let me tell you about those stinking brain peddlers. All they want is ten per cent, so they say. But do they also say that they'd sell a man and his work, work he might have sweated a couple of years over, for any piddling sum they offer. Hell, no!" His voice underwent a change. It was now insinuating, wheedling: "Mister Tarrant! You are a genius. I know that. Surely it is a work of art. But does it buy the ingredients for a Manhattan? Does it get two tickets for Carousel? Does it buy those nice tweeds you wear?"

"Well, does it?" Bruce asked.

"Guess he had me there. But look at it my way. This isn't my first writing I've done. Matter of fact I write for a living. Pulp stuff. Now don't dilate your nostrils that way, you look like Silver coming down the stretch. I don't pretend to be a Hemingway, or Lewis. But in my own way I serve the arts.

" 'The Street's My Beat' is a fine book. It's the best thing I've ever written. What's more it's a subject with which I'm more than just acquainted. I think it's a heck of a good

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book. And that's the reason I told my ten-percenter to take the breeze. I said I'd sell it if I had to personally see every bookseller in the U. S."

"So you came to see me," Bruce said. "I'm afraid that you have wasted your time. You see, I don't read anything until at least two of my readers have passed on it."

"Yeah. I've heard about you, and those readers. Is that why you missed on, 'Tears From Heaven'? You had first crack at it."

Bruce knew what Tarrant was talking about. His firm had the first reading on it. Well, it was one of those deals. The reader hadn't thought too much of it. Now . . .

"Very well, Tarrant," Bruce said. "I'll break a rule. It's always been a policy of mine never to make rules so hard and fast they can't be broken. I promise you'll have action on it in say, three days. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," Tarrant said. He smiled, rose, stretched for a second, started for the door, but turned as he reached it.

"Y'know," he said, "if you can give me ten minutes, I've got a terrific plot I could write into a novel. Care to listen?"

"Oh, come now, Tarrant. You've accomplished your mission. Let's not overdo it."

But Tarrant was not to be denied. He came back and resumed his seat.

"I was thinking in terms of, 'Tears.' Besides, it would be a matter of spec. Won't cost anything to listen. And maybe it might interest you.

"The story would concern the rise of a man in the world. It won't be one of those Alger deals because it won't have a rags-to-riches ending."

This time it was Bruce who rose.

"Look, Tarrant!" his voice was firm. "I must ask you to excuse me. I'm expecting an important phone call any moment. . . ."

"So until the call," Tarrant said. "When it comes I'll leave. The story is about a man who gets large powers, but does not use them to any purpose of his own. There's an outside agency which wants him to use them to their ends. What's more they are the ones who put the money up which enabled him to go into business. The plot becomes involved when these outsiders reveal their purpose; control of the world . . ."

BRUCE'S face underwent a startling transformation as Tarrant went on. The color rose and receded swiftly until he looked bloodless. Only his eyes blazed in sudden wild light. Then they too lost their life. But his brain was racing in speculation. Was this Tarrant the messenger after all? Was he going to give him his instructions as though it were the plot of a book?

Tarrant, seemingly unaware of what was going on in Bruce's mind, went on:

". . . Actually it could be called a fantasy. But fantasy and fact these days are synonymous. I had in mind to tell it in the first person; that gives a factual flavor to any story.

"The story starts at the end of the last war, World War I. A group of men band together to stop all wars. They choose a place as headquarters, let's say the interior of China. Lord knows there are enough hidden-away places there. Several of them have great wealth which is divided and distributed for reasons of proselyting. I pick China because many of the great pacifist movements have actually begun there.

"Converts are recruited carefully. There are always the mystics who want to act as sacrificial goats for any cause. These men are trained; after all the

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tentacles of this organization will reach throughout the world. . . ."

"Wait!" Bruce's voice was a shout. "I've got it! I mean I think you've got a terrific idea! Now *you* listen! These men are the ones who control things throughout the world anyway. But, as always, there are some men who can't be touched by this group. Men like Hitler. Megalomaniacs. So these men, or group, or whatever you want to call them, decide it is the little men they want to control. They want to have the little man in their palms. . . ."

"Well," Tarrant said on a note of doubt. "I didn't think quite in those terms or that far in advance. You've got this thing plotted more thoroughly than I have . . ."

NEITHER had noticed Jason's entrance. The first they were aware of his presence was when he coughed discreetly. Tarrant turned a glance over his shoulder while Bruce said:

"What is it, Jason?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir. He said he was expected."

Bruce had a feeling who this one was. It was the messenger he was expecting.

"Send him in, Jason," Bruce said. And to Tarrant, "If you'll excuse me, I have some business matters . . ."

Tarrant smiled gravely, reached for his case once more, and stepped to the door, saying as he did so, "I'll work out a synopsis of what we spoke of and bring it in with maybe two or three chapters worked out. Right?"

"Right."

Jason followed Tarrant from the room. He returned in a few seconds, on his heels, a small, neatly dressed man in neutral colored clothes. Bruce stared hard at the stranger. It was like looking at a grey wall. There was nothing on which he could pin a term. The man was so neutral.

Even his voice, when he spoke on Jason's closing of the door behind him, was neutral:

"I am here from the *Lamp* company."

Bruce's nose wrinkled in distaste. What sort of shenanigans was this? Lamp company! Good heavens! Were they going to make a farce out of this?

"Lamp company?" Bruce said. "What lamp company?"

"Let's not fence," the man said. "You know what I'm talking about. *The* lamp company. Now. Who was that person and what did he want?"

Bruce felt anger and though he tried to restrain himself it was in his voice when he said:

"What difference does it make to you who he was? Or what he was doing here?"

"It makes no difference to me. But it does to the one who sent me. I didn't like his looks. He had the air of one who can become unduly curious about things."

"Look, mister! I don't care what you think. Suppose you state your business and get the hell out of here," Bruce burst out.

"Very well," the other said precisely. "You will call a meeting of the board of Bruce Publications tonight. There, you will hand in your resignation. You will do so with the explanation that Aijan Machin is to be the next chairman and the man in sole charge of policy . . ."

"I will like so much!" Bruce gritted.

". . . Mister Machin will be on hand to take over your duties. He will also tell you what else is expected of you before the Keeper of the Lamp sees you. Understand?" the small man continued as if he hadn't heard Bruce's interruption.

A cold feeling of dread possessed

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Bruce. This little devil. His words, so cold, so final. It was like trying to argue with a robot.

FRED TARRANT had a thoughtful look on his face and the air of a man preoccupied with his own thoughts, as he stepped out into the street. They were deep thoughts, and they permitted nothing to intrude into their privacy. He was so lost in thought, that he walked squarely into the girl coming into the elevator, even though she did her best to avoid him. His briefcase caught her full in the nose. She let out a stifled screech of pain and placed both hands against the small tipped bit of flesh. A crimson thread seeped past the fingers.

Tarrant, jarred by the force of the accident, recovered and dropping his case stepped forward and took her hands away from the girl's face.

"Oh, darn! I've gone and bloodied your nose!"

"Oh, you, you clumsy idiot," she whimpered.

"Sure! Sure, you're right. I deserve worse names. But let's get that leak fixed before you spot your suit," Tarrant said. Nor did he wait for agreement on her part. Forgetting his briefcase, he took hold of an elbow and steered her for the drug store at one end of the building lobby.

He watched the druggist remove the salt-soaked bit of cotton from her nostrils and saw that they were no longer bleeding.

"See," Tarrant said. "All fixed. Good as new . . ."

"No thanks to you," the girl said. "So don't be so proud that it is. Thank you *very* much," she said to the druggist, who blushed and stuttered that it was quite all right. She turned and started for the door.

But Tarrant stood in her way. She tried to move around him and he stepped directly into her path.

"Wait, please," he said.

"Look, mister fix-it," she said, coming to a halt, and staring angrily up to the features of this man who wouldn't let her alone. "You've played boy scout. Your good deed's been done. The damage is forgotten and forgiven. And now if you don't mind, I have an important engagement. Would you mind letting me by?"

"Yeah," Tarrant said. He was more than crestfallen. It had been a very long time since he'd seen so pretty a girl. "Yeah. Oh, say. I left my briefcase in the lobby. Mind if I walk with you? Can't tell. You know people dash out of elevators. Might be handy to have me around, acting as interference."

"Interference is right," she said scathingly. "Well. The lobby is for the public's use. I suppose I can't stop you."

"Atta girl," Tarrant said.

She kept her face averted while he walked back with her. The starter had his case. He started to turn away, when he saw she continued to avoid his eyes, but stopped when she asked the starter:

"What floor does Mister Robert Bruce live on?"

"He's busy," Tarrant said, whipping around in her direction again.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Just come from there. He has some business with some guy who walked in just as I was going out."

Mona Lavy bit her lip in perplexity. She *should* have called, she knew then. Hang it!

"And I might as well tell you it looked like an all-morning affair," Tarrant continued. He had seen the frown of annoyance on her face. "Say. I'll bet you're a writer too. He's a tough

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man to sell. Of course if you've got an in . . . Now me, I got an in like Hope with Paramount. Why don't you let me buy you a drink. Okay! Coffee then," he amended, when he saw her flush and guessed it was in anger. "Maybe I can help you?"

"Maybe you can," she said. Mona was the sort who made her mind up quickly. If it was true that this man had sold Bruce than he could tell her something about Bruce. And there were some things she would have liked to know before she saw him.

"Swell!" Tarrant made no bones about his being grateful. He hadn't expected her to say yes. Yet he hadn't any ideas that his offer would be accepted so quickly. "Any place you'd like to eat at?"

"There's a nice place across the street," she said. "I've lunched there before."

"Well, we're a little too early for lunch. But if you're hungry, I'm sure they can fix you up."

"You're a *great* one for getting people fixed up, aren't you?" she asked, but her smile robbed the words of the nastiness which might have been read into them.

"Well," she began after the waitress had taken their order, "so give me the lowdown on Bruce."

"Y'mean on how to sell him?" he asked.

"Umm, yes."

"That depends on *what* you want to sell," he replied. "He buys all kinds of things. Fact articles, mystery stories, westerns, book-length stuff, and novels of fact and fiction. What are you doing or what have you done?"

"I'm doing a fact crime story. . . ."

"Oh!" he broke in. "For True Mystery. Go on."

"Yes. It's a story about a group of men who are trying to control the crime elements of the world. Rather consolidate them under a single leadership. . . ."

"Did you say a *true* mystery?" he broke in once again. "Holy whitefish bellies! Lady, you're hitting for one of his science-fiction group. Matter of fact I saw him today on a story I'm doing. That's odd. It's a bit like that. Say! I've got an idea. Let's combine our stories."

He was smiling broadly as he talked. And she saw he was kidding her.

"You have," she said slowly, bitingly, "a peculiar sense of humor. I'll bet that once you attempted gag writing for radio, but somehow never found a comedian who could give the baff laughs you wanted when he heard your stuff. Now if we're going to have low comedy, let's just call it quits."

"Please. Don't get me wrong. I was pulling your leg. And a . . ."

"Mighty pretty leg it is," she said. "Now are you going to tell me something about Bruce or aren't you?"

"EVERYTHING I can," he said in more sober tones. "But what can I tell you about the man that you can't get from *Who's who?* But about that story you're doing. Certainly you didn't think he'd fall for that. It's ridiculous, for a fact story. But fiction, well, it's not exactly new. I've written dozens of stories around the same theme. He'd buy that especially if it were handled right. Give it that slant."

"What slant?"

And Tarrant knew the only slant which she could give her story was the one he was going to use. H'm. Not so hot. She was pretty and all that. But his story in her hands. Uhn. Uhn.

The white apron of the waitress intruded between their talk. She was a tall woman in her middle years, with a long face which was accented by a

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large, red-veined nose. Neither had given her a second glance when they had ordered. Now they looked blankly at her as she placed the dishes before Mona and the coffee, which was all Tarrant had ordered, before him.

"Sorry, miss," she said. "On'y vegetable we had was corn. But I had 'em fix it nice. . . ."

Mona had ordered a beef stew on Tarrant's recommendation. She was possessed of an ever-healthy appetite. So she smiled up at the woman and said:

"That's all right. Nothing wrong with corn."

The woman smiled and walked off. Tarrant idly watched her step into the kitchen. An instant later, another girl bearing a tray walked out into the dining room. Her order was for a table beside theirs. Tarrant, watching the girl place the dishes on the table, admired the skill with which she made room for them. Coffee placed here; main dish there; vegetables, which in this case seemed to consist of peas . . . Peas! But that was what Mona had ordered, Tarrant thought in surprise. Why was she given corn?

He turned to the girl who had started on her meal. He was just in time to see her take a small forkful of corn in her mouth. She started to chew at it and an odd look of distaste wrinkled her face.

Tarrant could only call it instinct. But the words were out of him before he knew they had more than formed in his mind:

"Spit it out! Quick!"

She was only too glad to do as he ordered. There was an odd bitterness to the taste of the corn. She hadn't swallowed any but already she felt a retch come to her throat. Manners were forgotten. She bent her head almost to the meat plate and spit the mess out into it. But reflex action made her swallow the saliva.

"Stick your finger down your throat," Tarrant said tersely, his eyes fixed in unwavering attention on her face.

But there was no need for that. She became sick without the emergency relief he had ordered.

Glances of disgust and curiosity were thrown at them from nearby diners. Tarrant knew better than to look for their waitress. He had an idea that she had found the rear exit to the restaurant. He arose, stepped around the table to Mona's side, and helped her to her feet. There was a woman coming from a door, marked, ladies, over at the far right side of the room. He placed one arm around Mona's waist and pulled her to the door.

She was able to murmur:

"I can . . . make it from . . . Oops!"

THE door closed on her being sick. But Tarrant was no longer there. He had turned and was striding back to the table. But it was no longer empty. There was a man leaning over it, the two women who were seated at the table behind Tarrant and Mona, two waitresses, and even as Tarrant got there, three other diners.

"Anything wrong, sir?" the strange man asked.

"You the manager?" Tarrant asked.

"Yes. Anything wrong, sir?" the manager asked again.

"Only with the food," Tarrant said and turned to look down at the table. "Hey!" he yelped. "Where's the dish of corn?"

"Corn, sir?" the manager said.

"Yes. She ordered peas, but the waitress said they were out and would she have corn instead. Now the dish is gone."

Tarrant whirled on the curious on-

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lookers.

"Anybody see that dish disappear?" he asked.

There was a shaking of heads and shrugging of shoulders, but it seemed that no one had seen the dish of corn.

"Are you sure the girl said there was no peas?" the manager asked. "I'm asking because that's a dish we always have."

"Positive. That's what made me suspicious," Tarrant lied. Actually there was no reason for his suspicion, except that of some strange instinct which had compelled him to shout his warning.

"And where's the girl?" Tarrant continued.

"I don't think we'll see her," Mona said. She had come up behind them. She looked paler than usual. But Tarrant saw that she seemed all right, other than a whiteness about the lips.

"I'm very sorry this happened," the manager said hastily on seeing Mona. "If there's anything else you'd like. Of course there'd be no charge . . ."

"Thank you, no," Mona said. "Come along," to Tarrant. "I just thought of something . . ."

Neither saw the dark-faced man in unobtrusive dress get up from a table close to the door and follow them the instant they passed through it.

Mona took the lead. She had parked her car down the street. Tarrant tagged along almost a pace in the rear. The girl was in an obvious hurry. But though Tarrant tried to make conversation she was silent to any gambit he laid in her path. Finally after a hundred feet of this silence, Tarrant gave up and just tagged along, content to go where she led. And behind them the stranger moved, always just out of sight, yet not so far that he could not observe their smallest move.

Their tail almost missed getting a cab because Mona's move to her car was so sudden. As it was she was half way down the block before the stranger pulled a Yellow Cab over to the curb.

Mona drove, her eyes straight ahead watching traffic. Tarrant sat silent beside her. She began to talk but did not look at him:

"Why did someone try to kill me in that restaurant? What do you know about it?"

"I?" bewilderment made his voice rise. "What the . . . Now *wait* a minute!"

"Then why did you pick that place to eat in?" she insisted. Then after a short silence, "Oh. I suppose you couldn't have known. I—I've got to talk to someone. I lied to you. I know Robert Bruce. But when you said you wrote for him, I got a wild idea. There are some things I've got to know. I thought perhaps you could solve a puzzle for me."

He thought, "Baby. You're a puzzle in yourself. What makes you go 'round?" Instead, he said:

"Anything I can do I'll be glad to. Ask away."

"First," she continued, "we've got to think something out. Do you think someone has attempted murder?"

Tarrant cogitated for a few seconds. It didn't seem possible that what she had asked could be true yet on the face of it he had to accept the act as such. Though how they knew Tarrant and the girl would pick just that restaurant in which to eat was beyond any guess he could make.

"I can't say with certainty," he said. "But let's assume so. Why?"

"Later," she said. "How did they know we were going to eat there? And before you answer that," she turned with a swift, illuminating smile to him, "I want you to know I've eliminated

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you from the list of suspects."

"There's a *list* of suspects?" he asked.

"Yes. Well, any idea about that?"

"I'VE been thinking it over," he said, shaking his head. "And I've got to admit I'm stuck for an answer."

"So am I," she said. "Because in that block alone there are some four places we could have gone into. Yet we *know* that waitress skipped the minute she served me. How did they *know?* We could just as well think of supernatural powers, right?"

Tarrant grinned. But the grin changed to a frown when he saw there was no answering smile on her face.

"Sure! Or mental telepathy, if you want. What makes you say that?"

"Because," she said, "like the comedian on the air, it's true."

Tarrant digested that. It didn't go well with his breakfast. He switched from one thought to another. Was this girl a bit wacky? No! Yet . . . He looked out of the window and saw they were on the Drive.

"By the way," he said. "Where are we bound for?"

"My place."

"Uhn, uhn. Since we're operating on the assumption it was attempted murder, they'll know it didn't work. Holy whitefish bellies! We're dopes. They must have had us spotted when we walked out. And for sure there's a tail on us. Turn right at North and we'll start doing circles."

Tarrant caught the Yellow following, when Mona made a turn on Banks Street.

"Pull into the curb," he said sharply.

The car hadn't quite stopped rolling when he leaped from the seat and stepped directly into the path of the cab. There was a squealing of brakes applied hastily, and Tarrant caught a quick glimpse of a man in the rear seat shouting to the driver. But if what he was saying to the driver was to the effect he wanted him not to stop, the driver hadn't paid any heed.

Tarrant jerked the door open and reached in with one long arm and hauled the stranger out.

"Now, mister, start talking," he said.

The other tried to jerk loose but Tarrant only brought his hand higher until he was almost lifting the other off the ground.

"Are you gonna sing or do I have to break you in two?" Tarrant grunted.

"Hey, fella, what's all the excitement?" the cab driver asked. He had left his cab the moment Tarrant had dragged his fare from the back seat.

"I don't know," Tarrant said. "But I'm gonna find out. Right now."

"I thought this guy was kinda hot, askin' me ta folly the broad," the cabbie said. "Maybe he needs a little persuadin', huh?"

Tarrant saw the stranger's eyes shift in fear. Already a crowd was gathering, it was just after lunch hour and although Banks was a quiet street normally, it only took something like this to make it look like Rush Street when there is a fight outside of a tavern.

"Okay. I'll talk," the man said. "Where can we go?"

Tarrant loosed his hold and before the stranger had any idea of what was going on, he was frisked. He had no gun that Tarrant could feel.

"In the girl's car," Tarrant said. "Let's go."

Mona accepted the situation as if she had been expecting it. Tarrant made the stranger sit in the middle.

"244 Addison," Tarrant said.

She gave him a quick look, then nodded to herself, set the car in gear and started off. It was a ten minute run down the Outer Drive.

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"Make a break and I'll knock you silly," Tarrant warned as they got out of the car.

Tarrant shoved the man into one of the two overstuffed chairs, motioned Mona to the sofa, and dragged up a kitchen chair for himself.

"Well," Tarrant prompted.

The stranger spread his hands flat in a gesture of resignation and began:

"Okay. I'm a private eye. Work for Congress Detectives. Boss calls me in this morning and gives me the case. Get down to Cambridge Place and trail a woman, Mona Lavy. And, mister, that's all I know."

"Why?" Mona burst out. "Who did the hiring?"

"Sorry, miss," the operative said. "That's all I know. Sometimes we work direct with the client. Sometimes we don't. This is one of those deals where the client is in the dark. And there won't be any use trying to make the boss talk. He won't."

"What's your name?" Tarrant asked.

"Broach," the man said. "John Broach. But if you're going to call I might as well tell you it won't do any good. The boss'll even deny knowing me."

"The man's right," Tarrant said sourly. "Okay. Scram, mister."

TARRANT came back from the kitchen, a couple of drinks in his hands. Mona was sitting relaxed on the wide sofa. He placed them on the cocktail table, found a seat beside her and said:

"Drink first. Talk later. Here's for the best."

She downed the drink with him and smiled with her eyes over the rim of the glass.

"From the beginning," she promised. "My name is Mona Lavy. I don't know whether you've ever heard of my father, but he was a publisher. In a small way. He published magazines of the occult. He died a short while ago.

"Now," she paused, took a deep breath, as though she were plunging into deep water and continued, "about three years ago he received a letter from a man named Aijan Machin. I was in the office when it was brought in. He read it and I saw that the letter had upset him considerably. I knew that sooner or later he'd talk about it. So I didn't ask what was in it. I say that I *knew* he would talk about it. But I was mistaken. He didn't. A week later there was a second letter. And this one positively frightened him speechless. I didn't wait for a confidence but took the page out of his hand and read it for myself. Let me see if I can remember it literally . . .

" 'My Dear Lavy,' it began. 'I don't think it too wise an action on your part to disregard the message which was sent to you. We asked you to call on Machin, personally. You have not done so. There can be no recourse from a continued refusal. We can only gather that you are no longer an active member of the organization. Of course you realize what that means.' "

Tarrant was regarding her with a blank look and a hung chin.

"My father died in mysterious circumstances. The doctor called it heart failure. Yet he had gone to him only two weeks before for a complete physical check-up and had taken a cardiograph. There was nothing wrong with my father's heart.

"*Something killed* my father!"

"What do you mean, something?" Tarrant asked.

"What else can *it* be called? One second he was sitting in his chair doing some editorial work, the next he was slumped over, dead. I was there in the room. Nothing and no one was

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with us. What am I to think?"

"Was he examined for drugs?" Tarrant asked. It was impossible, he thought.

"He was dead of heart failure. Nothing else. The doctor said he'd stake his reputation on it."

Tarrant couldn't believe it. There had to be a more valid reason. But it seemed there was none, or Mona wanted to go on to something more important.

"My father must have had an idea of what was going to happen. Because a short while before his death, he called me in and told me a story. Please see if you can make something out of it.

"About twenty-nine years ago my father went to the interior of China. I don't know *why* he went nor did he explain. He only told me what happened there. He saw someone called the Keeper of the Lamp. There were eight other men in the Refuge; that's what they called this place they were in. Only Dad called them Gamen. Dad said they were instructed in various things, some I could understand, others I couldn't.

"Wait. Don't interrupt," she said to Tarrant when she saw his lips part. "For example, Dad was taught the world of the occult. It seems the Keeper wanted Dad to go back to the world and give it messages through the use of a magazine he was to found. He was furnished money and facilities. But he was also taught something called *tauatu.*"

"And what is *tauatu?*" Tarrant asked.

"The ability to project your thoughts over distances. A sort of telepathy. But there was a single receiver, the Keeper of the Lamp. Further, the Keeper alone had the means of signaling to those for whom he had messages. Now let me get back to what happened after father's death.

"I knew Machin's address. So *I* communicated with him. I told him I knew my father's duties and that he had instructed me in them. Why couldn't I become a member of the organization? Machin agreed. As a matter of fact he seemed anxious for me to join. I attended two meetings. The first seemed to be a sort of social affair. You know, cocktails and canapes. It was a mixed group although the men were predominant. There were two Chinese present and one Jap. The nationalities were also mixed. The talk was light and varied, very little of politics or international doings. I was disappointed, to say the least. Until almost time for departure.

"I WAS talking to Gordon Chen and another whose name I don't recall. Machin came over and joined us. This other man said something about the realities of the supernatural. And Machin said a strange thing. He said, 'The West has always received the light. And it has always come from the East. Who knows but that the day may soon come when the East will no longer give the light. Then there will be eternal darkness over the West . . .' Tarrant, I puzzled over those words for a long time. It wasn't until the last meeting that I got their meaning.

"My father edited a magazine called, *Occulti.* There was something said at the last meeting. I thought it sounded familiar. And I found the interpretation in *Occulti.*

"There was a man there who said, 'Bow before the Lamp and the Flame, before knowledge and death.' My father had written, 'First, before all else, there was the Flame. And for the Flame there had to be a vessel, the Lamp. In the Flame is all knowledge

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and in the Lamp, death. Ayame, the seer of the Basalt mountain said that the two are synonymous. But he also said that the Lamp came first; first the vessel, then its contents, death. We have no choice. The road is plain. Knowledge leads but to death.' Does that make sense, Tarrant?"

"Honey chile," Tarrant said, "nothing makes sense. I don't know whether you've been smoking something or not. But it sure sounds like it . . ."

"Then why," Mona asked, "did you stop me from eating that corn?"

He shrugged his shoulders. But when she smiled somewhat grimly and wanted to go on, he stopped her:

"Search me," he said. "All I gotta say is that out of all that you've told me the only thing that makes sense is the name, Gordon Chen. And his name alone is what makes me think it's all a pipe dream.

"Like I told you, I'm a writer. Pulp stuff, in the main. Sells like mad and my editor tells me I've even got a fan following. But we fellas don't dream the stuff up. We've got to do as much research as the big boys in the slicks. Chinatown and the Chinese are favorite heroes or villains however we cast them. And who do you think I go to when I want information? You guessed it, Gordy Chen . . ."

"All right," she finally managed to get in. "What do *you* think of Chen?"

"One swell guy, that's what I think of Gordy. Look. I've known Gordy for some nine or ten years now. I've never known him to be other than kind, gentle and intelligent. What's more, that's not my opinion alone. All of Chinatown agrees with me. His name is a password there. I've gotten into more places just by saying Gordy sent me, than if I had an F. B. I. badge."

She sighed aloud, a small sound of resignation. She came slowly erect from her seat on the sofa and reached for her purse. Tarrant watched her narrowly. Her face was blank hiding her thoughts. She stood, started for the door and there was something final in her walk, something in the stiffness of the head and shoulders which were like words saying, well, that's all . . .

"And where do you think you're going?" Tarrant asked.

"Home," she said. "I'm tired suddenly." Her back was to him.

"Now let's not be foolish," he said.

"I made a mistake and thought you'd see things in my light. I suppose I shouldn't have thought that way. After all it was too much to expect. So I'll go it alone . . ."

Her hand was on the knob and her back was still to him. He took a few strides and with his long legs they brought him to the door. He took her hand gently away from the knob.

"Okay. You win. I'll play all the way. First," he said as he steered her back to the couch, "I'm going to see Gordy Chen. Alone. But first we have to get you located in a place where they won't find you. Certainly you can't stay here or at your hotel or apartment. I think I know of a place . . . Yep! Be back in a couple of seconds."

She could hear him talking in a muffled voice from the alcove where the phone was. He returned and there was a broad grin on his mouth.

"Did it!" he said exultantly. "It pays to have friends. Some guy I know is a desk clerk. Did him a favor once and now he's returned it. Jackson Hotel, room 924, that's your new address. Let's go."

TARRANT breathed a sigh of relief as he looked back to the towering edifice of the Jackson Hotel. He was pretty sure Mona would be safe,

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at least till he got back from Chen's place. He wished he could believe her and not think it was fantasy she was spilling. He couldn't quite get her angle in telling him those things. Unless she was going to do a story and wanted to try it out on him first.

She had given him the keys to her car. He turned the ignition on and put the clutch in. But before he released it, he looked in the rear vision mirror to see if there was anything suspicious to be seen. Nothing. He let the clutch out and started rolling.

The letters on the window were square, a half moon of lettering which announced that Gordon Chen was an importer of Chinese curios. The familiar sound of a tinkling bell, and the pungent odor of incense, were the first things to greet him as he opened the door. The single clerk Chen employed looked up from the white customer he was waiting on, recognized Tarrant, and smiled in silent greeting. Tarrant pointed a finger at the curtain separating the front from the rear. The clerk shook his head, yes.

Just as Tarrant reached the curtain he pulled a half dollar from his pocket and held it in the fingers of his left hand. Then he parted the material.

"I win," he said to the Chinese seated in the barrel chair beside the elaborate lamp.

"Of course, my friend," Chen said. "What better way to pass the time than in the quest of knowledge? And who gets the half buck this time?"

"Let's give it to the Society Of Starving Booksellers," Tarrant said. "We've tried every other worthy cause."

Tarrant had noticed Chen's absorption in a book every time he had come. It had come to the stage, finally, where he had expected it. But once Chen had disappointed him. So Tarrant made a bet with himself. That for every time Chen was *not* in a book when he came over Tarrant would have to give money to charity. Tarrant did not lose often.

"Well, Dale. What's new?" Chen asked, as he carefully closed the rather large volume.

"Not much, keed," Tarrant said.

"Which means my friend Tarrant has something on his mind, as if I didn't know," Chen said. "Okay, spill it."

"Sure," Tarrant said. "What's *tauatu?*"

Chen had a smooth, hairless face. It was difficult to tell how old he was. It was, because of the composed placidity of the features, also difficult to tell what was going on in his mind. But this time Tarrant had scored a bull's-eye. The features underwent a strange transformation. There was a single word to describe what Tarrant saw written on the olive skin, *fear!*

"Taua-Taua," Chen stuttered. "Where did *you* hear of *Tauatu?* How . . ."

"First you," Tarrant said grimly. So Mona *was* right.

But if Tarrant had made a crack in the Chinese imperturbability it was not for long. The features assumed their old expression of calm and the eyes were as blameless of sin or wrongdoing as a child's.

"It is something of which very few Occidentals have any knowledge," Chen said. "Simply, *tauatu* is thought transference. I'm just curious as to how you learned of it."

"From Mona Lavy," Tarrant said, hitting him with a load from the other barrel.

This time Chen was prepared.

"Mona Lavy, eh. A very charming young woman. I had great respect for her father."

"I hear you knew him in the old

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days," Tarrant said carefully. This was treacherous ground. He didn't want to get in over his depth. "Y'know, back in the days when you were *Gamen* in the refuge on the mountain retreat . . ."

"I see her father spoke his mind," Chen said.

"Yes," Tarrant broke in. "Just before he died. Someone tried to kill Mona this afternoon . . . Later a fly cop tailed us from the restaurant. Know anything about that?"

"Why should I?" Chen asked.

"Because it seems you were at a meeting over at Machin's. And because she thinks that the whole thing started there."

"Are you accusing me of anything, Dale?" Chen asked.

Tarrant was silent. He didn't know what reply to give.

Chen went on. "Dale, how did you get mixed up in this?"

"It doesn't matter," Tarrant said. "What *does* matter is that it has become a personal problem with me. I want to find out what is behind all this, how it concerns Miss Lavy."

CHEN had been holding the large book in his lap. He put it to one side and stood up. Tarrant was always startled on seeing Chen come to his feet. The man was gigantic, dwarfing Tarrant's own six feet and over by several inches. He was not alone tall, but also wide, heavy, thick-necked, broad-shouldered.

Tarrant knew Chen was not one of the Cantonese usually associated by the white man as being representative of all Chinese. Chen came from some region in Outer Mongolia. He had once said most of the men there were built on his lines.

"I see," Chen said. "I think I understand. And for once, Dale, there is nothing I can do for you. But I *can* give you an idea about us. Do you remember something which happened in Chinatown back a couple of years ago? Something which had to do with the Dragon War?"

Tarrant's brow wrinkled in memory. The Dragon War, despite its high-sounding name, had been a simple clash of personalities for control of gambling in the district. Tarrant had thought there would be excellent material for a story and had come to Chen for help, which, as always, Chen had given. Tarrant shook his head.

"Then you remember Sun Yet Ling?" Chen asked.

"Wasn't he the one who was ousted?" Tarrant asked.

"Right. Do you know what happened?"

"Uh, uh."

"He was simply told that the Keeper of the Lamp thought it was not meet that gambling should be held above the spirit of light."

"How you like, Gordy," Tarrant said, "to give a riddle as the key to another riddle. Translate."

A buzzer's whirring sound made them turn their heads. It was the clerk's summons. There was an important client in the outer room who wanted to see Chen himself.

"I think you'll have to figure that one out for yourself, Dale," Chen said gravely. "Sorry."

"You mean that's all there is to it?" Tarrant asked. He put his fingers on Chen's sleeve.

"No! That's *not* all! Tell Miss Lavy to get as far away from Chicago as possible," Chen said vehemently.

Tarrant's fingers tightened on the cloth.

"Hey! Are you threatening her?" he demanded.

"Not I. Nor is it a threat. That's

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a command!" Chen said. And for the first time in all the years of their friendship Tarrant saw Chen in another light. It wasn't a pleasant light. There was menace and worse in the Chinese's voice and manner. The white man went pale in anger.

"Look here, Gordy," he began.

But Chen whipped his arm free of the other's grip and said:

"Better leave now, Dale. I have someone waiting."

"Okay, Gordy. I'll go. And when I return I'll have the answer to the puzzle you've given me."

For the first time that day Tarrant's thoughts were not on Mona Lavy. There was a file in the room in his apartment which he used for an office. He kept carbons of all his stories in that file. The Dragon War was in there somewhere.

ROBERT BRUCE turned the last of the lights low. Jason had left only a few moments before. Bruce was all alone in the apartment. He sat back in the wide chair and let himself go lax. It had been a long time since he had gone into *tauatu*.

Slowly things began to lose their sharp definitions. The room became a blur of soft lightly defined shadows. His eyes remained open but a haze slipped over his mind. The shadows in the room lengthened, deepened until the whole room was a mask of darkness that was like dusk.

Softly, bell-like, there stole from every corner of the shadows, the sound of a gong. Three times a single note was repeated like a summons.

"I hear . . . and *obey!*" Bruce said. His voice had answered the summons of the gong, but his lips had not opened to let the words through.

It was a whisper of sound, a thread which, to anyone else, would not have made sense, but to Bruce it was as a shout:

"Hear and obey!" the words came from the darkness. "I command thee!"

"From the far corners of the light which the Lamp sheds I bring thee the spirit. The time has come! The world is sinful and full of arrogance. Man has it not in him to learn. I have decided that before knowledge can be given death must fall among the arrogant and noisy.

"I command thee to let thy spirit fly to me. Thy tasks have been done well and thy reward is at my hand . . ."

The return to light was swifter than the previous transformation. The shadows were gone. There was only the soft light from the lamps in the room. The man in the chair stirred and suddenly moved. There was a wild look in his eyes. There had been no mistaking that voice. It *was* the Keeper of the Lamp.

Bruce wiped the beading of sweat from his brow. So the moment was at hand. He licked his lips. He wished he knew what the Keeper had in mind for him. He sighed deeply.

His mind came out of the depths into which it had been plunged by the words from the unknown. He knew that the end would not be long in coming. If only there was time to do what he wanted to do. In rapid succession he considered and rejected several possibilities. There simply wasn't time for any elaborate plots. He knew he hadn't long to live, and knew also that there wasn't anything he could do about it. Who, how, what choice had he? If only he could tell his story to someone . . .

He snapped his fingers! That young fellow who came to his place only that morning! What was his name? Tarring . . . No, Tarrant. Dale Tarrant. Of course. He still had his manuscript.

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There would be an address on it. There always was.

His haste was feverish. His hands weren't steady and there was a tremble to his body as he scrambled with clumsy fingers among the papers on his desk. Ah! There it was.

Wonderful, he exulted. Tarrant was thorough. He not only gave an address but also a phone. Buckingham 23534 . . .

IT TOOK a long time, Bruce thought, for him to answer. Maybe he wasn't home? Maybe he had an office somewhere? These writers! Damn them! Did they have to live as the public imagined they do? Aah! A voice . . .

"Hello!" Bruce said in a strident voice. "Tarrant?"

There was an affirmative answer.

"Fine, fine! Glad I got you in. This is Robert Bruce . . . That's right . . . Look, Tarrant. Are you busy tonight? . . . Is it that late? . . . Well, I think it's of sufficient importance to you so that you can forego your usual eight hours sleep or whatever amount you get. I want you to get here as quickly as you can. No! Leave now. In your pyjamas if you have to. Get a cab! I promise whatever your trouble you will be well-repaid . . ."

Tarrant's eyes widened in surprise when he saw Bruce. The man looked feverish, frightened, Tarrant thought.

"Aah!" Bruce sighed in relief when he saw the lank length of the other. "You *did* hurry. Good. Well, come in. I won't be more than a couple of seconds . . . want to get things right for you. Yes. Mustn't forget things at a moment like this."

Tarrant shook his head in bewilderment. The man sounded like he was off his nut. And the way he was going at the papers on the wide desk. Tarrant kept a sidewise look at the other, as he found a seat. It didn't take long. Bruce grunted aloud in satisfaction and came up with a thin sheaf of loose papers. He turned in a quick pivot and strode to the love seat on which Tarrant was sitting and fell into the down pillow. He breathed in a stertorous manner, his breath whistling through his nostrils.

"Hey!" Tarrant warned. "Better take it easy! You'll have a stroke. It'll keep for a couple of seconds . . ."

"Perhaps not," Bruce said. "Can't take a chance. No time for preamble and I'm sure there won't be time for any explanations afterward. Got to tell the whole thing as best I can. Listen . . ."

Tarrant happened to glance at the desk clock at the very instant Bruce finished his tale. Exactly an hour had gone by. Tarrant couldn't believe his eyes. A whole lifetime had gone by! Lifetime? A thousand years had passed before his eyes. He wished he could laugh or cry or anything except sit this way with his mouth hanging open like a trap for flies.

The wildest tales of the drunkest drunk he had ever listened to could not begin to approximate the story this man had told. Not even in the most lurid of fantasy tales had he ever read the like. Incredible was a mild term for it. Yet . . .

Bruce was sitting, his head bowed, his hands plastered to the greying hair at the temples. He was still breathing gustily as though he had been running. Tarrant shoved roughly at the shoulder nearest him.

"Bruce! Bruce!" he called.

"Yeah," the other grunted.

"F'r the love of God, man," Tarrant said. "Get yourself under control. I'm not making any comment on what you've said; I'm not saying I believe or don't. But for Heaven's sake get

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hold of yourself before you break into little bits of jittering pieces."

"I won't now," Bruce said. "Not now anymore. Enough of what I told you is in those pieces of paper you have there. Don't lose them. Names, places, dates, they're all there. It's going to be a hell of a big job getting people to believe all this but you'll have to do it somehow. Now here's an angle, here's an . . ."

TARRANT started to call his name. But the word never left his lips. A startling transformation came over the man by Tarrant's side. For suddenly he sat erect as though drawn to the back of the sofa by invisible strings. His face, usually full of color, became pale, as if the blood had been drained from it. His eyes were wide, unseeing, staring blindly past Tarrant, though his face was turned toward him. Suddenly he jerked slightly, his face made a terrible grimace and from the corner of his mouth saliva dripped in a thin thread.

"Bruce!" Tarrant whispered in horror. "What's wrong, man?"

There was no answer. As if by magic, Bruce's face assumed its natural look. The color came back and the mouth once more became full and red. Only the eyes continued their blank staring.

It was the stare of a dead man!

Tarrant did not know how long a time he spent in just gazing into the empty eyes. It could not have been too long. A cigarette he had lain in the ashtray was just shedding its last ash. He rose to his feet though his bones felt fluid, and when he stood erect it was not in his erect, lithe tallness. He stooped as if in weariness.

Like a dog shakes himself free of water, was how Tarrant shook himself free of the horror which had enveloped him. Once more his brain was at work. He didn't look at Bruce anymore. The dead stay dead, he thought. But in this case the dead might talk. And he didn't want to be around when that dead-faced fish, Jason, returned.

He pulled a kerchief from his pocket and went systematically about removing every evidence of his having been in the room. Nor did he forget to wipe the doorknob free of his fingerprints. He took a last look at the dead man, still sitting erect in the sofa, turned, and with kerchief still around the knob, walked out into the foyer. He was thankful the elevator was one of the self-service kind.

He looked in both directions when he reached the street. He had parked Mona's car around the corner. He shrugged himself deeper into his jacket, patted his pocket to make sure the papers Bruce had thrust on him were still there, and stepped out onto the sidewalk. Though the street was empty except for a man and woman walking arm and arm on the opposite side of the street a half block down, Tarrant had the peculiar feeling that invisible eyes were stabbing into his back. So strong was the feeling that when he was half way to the corner he turned on his heels abruptly, and stared intently down the stretch of empty street to see if there was a reason for his feeling.

He drove with only part of his mind on the traffic. The most of it was on what had happened. As Bruce had said, he had all the things necessary, names, addresses, dates, and reasons. And not alone in just talk. He had the papers to prove . . . Once more his hand went to his breast.

There should have been the familiar rustle of paper. But there was nothing. He stopped the car nor did he care or know whether there was traffic behind him or not. His hand went to the in-

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side pocket. Nothing. He gagged in sudden terror. He *knew* he had placed those papers there! Why only a few moments before he had felt them. How, when . . .?

He started the car once more. And this time he drove with a frantic unseeing wildness which somehow, and only through the favor of the goddess of fortune, did not pile him up in a wreck, to the Jackson Hotel. Through the fog of his terror there came a single thought, Mona. She *had* to be all right!

The clerk started back in fright at sight of Tarrant.

"Quick! Ring Miss Lavy," Tarrant said, pounding a fist on the desk.

"Huh? Huh?" the clerk bleated.

"Damn you! Ring 924, d'you hear?"

Her sleepy voice was the most welcome sound Tarrant had ever heard.

"It's me, Dale," Tarrant said. "Put something on. I'm coming up. And don't ask why; it's too important to be told over the phone."

SHE had a filmy bit of silk covering her night gown. He could see the swelling of curves; he could feel the warmth of her. Her nearness and the scant costume she was wearing stirred his senses like a heady wine. It took a real effort to thrust aside the physical thoughts which surged within him. She must have felt what he was thinking because the color in her cheeks heightened and she had to turn her head aside. But the tableaux could not be kept indefinitely.

She made the first move, stepping aside so he could get by. He made no small talk, knowing she was waiting with breathless interest:

"Yeah. I know. I should have called you when I got back from Gordy Chen's. But he told me something I could trace. And up to an hour or so ago, I was busy leafing through my files on this deal. Then I got a phone call.

"You might as well sit down, Mona. You might *fall* down when I spit out what I have to."

She curled up on the sofa and waited until he dragged a straight-backed chair up and sat facing her. He spoke swiftly, in a low tone, trying hard not to make it sound too dramatic:

"The call was from Robert Bruce. He sounded frightened, excited. He wanted me to come out, fast! I hopped in your car and got down there in a couple of minutes. He was waiting for me. Mona, I know now that everything you told me this afternoon is true. What's more, I *know* your father was killed.

"Yes. It's true. Bruce told me. He told me a hell of a lot more than that. What's more he had written evidence, well, perphaps you couldn't bring it into a court of law and have them call it legal, but to my way of looking at it, it was good enough for me, Mona. This thing is world-wide. Under the guise of an agency which advocates peace, there is a terrible influence at work aiming for the overthrow of this whole world, and if not by peaceful measures, then by force.

"Your father, Bruce, Chen, Machin and dozens of other men, placed in strategic positions throughout the world, were agents in the direct employ of this *force*. Your father rebelled after several years; he was able to see what was behind the words and signs. Bruce rebelled also. And like your father, he was too late. Or perhaps powerless against the force. Bruce died tonight, Mona. I saw him die. Yet I'm willing to bet my last dollar that when the doctor examines him the doctor will say Robert Bruce died of a heart disease."

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Her face was a pair of wide dark eyes. He centered his glance on them. They regarded his with a fixed, hypnotic look, as though what he had just told her was beyond belief. He went on:

"I believe now because something happened to me on my way here that smacks of the unreal, the supernatural. I had those papers in my breast pocket when I left Bruce's apartment. Not more than three minutes ago I felt for them. They were not there. And when I reached inside with my fingers," he suited the action to the words, "I found this."

He pulled his fingers loose. Between them, she saw a fine grey ash.

"Wh-What happened to the papers?" she said stumblingly.

"I'd like an answer to that myself," he said. "What's the difference? I don't think they'd have believed me anyhow. Y'know what I think, Mona?"

She was past thinking. These past two weeks, tied up in a tight knot all the time. Seeing Machin, his devil's face, those wet warm brown eyes watching her, probing at her. Those strange men and women she saw, her father's death . . . She shuddered suddenly. But when he leaned forward at the gesture in a move of sympathy, she shook her head, no.

"I'm all right. Maybe for the first time in weeks. Now the uncertainty is over. We're facing the facts. Go ahead. Tell me what you think."

HER speech was short, jerky, but there was purpose in the words, determination in the sweep of chin and in the look of her eyes.

"First I'm going to see a friend of mine. A chap by the name of John Gaylord. He's an agent for the Sec. Council of the U. N. To put it plainly, he's top Intelligence man for our government. I don't know whether he'll believe us or not, but we'll have to take that chance. While I'm gone, and I'm going as soon as I leave here, I'll want you to do something. You said this afternoon that you found a clue or key in something your father wrote. Try to find the magazine in which those words appeared . . ."

"But Dale," she broke in. "Through the years there must have been several hundred separate issues of that magazine . . ."

"I know," he said. "First try the one in which he gave you the first clue. Perhaps there are others, also? Or maybe he hints or tells of another issue in which one appears. We'll simply have to track the darn thing down. You see, I believe your father had an idea what was going to happen to him. I *know* he had. There was but a single path open to him, the magazine."

Mona shook her head in agreement.

"I think as you," she said. "Very well. I'll get dressed right now and get over to my place. If you remember there's a complete file, but of course you don't remember. You've never been there."

"No. But if I ever have the chance," Tarrant said, "I'm going to make it a habit being there."

Their smiles were love candles lighting their faces. And Tarrant, when he reached the door, swung around, dashed back to where Mona waited for him, took the girl in his arms, planted a kiss which seemed to last forever on her lips, and ran out. He didn't have to say anything. She knew what the kiss was for. And the pressure of her lips in return was answer enough for him.

MONA inserted the key in the lock with all the stealth of a house breaker. The door creaked slightly, a familiar creak. Yet she gave a nervous start at the sound. The switch was be-

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side the door. She pressed it and found that she was holding her breath in the second of time which passed before the light flicked on.

The room was empty of course. But her sigh of relief was as profound as if she had seen dragons vanish. When she walked across the floor toward the dining room, which also served her as library, it was with renewed confidence. How silly she was, she thought. Phantasms exist only in the mind. Once more she pressed at a switch set beside a door.

"What took you so long?" a cultured voice asked.

She could only stand and stare. There were two men in the room. One was a tall, heavy, Chinese. The other was short, slender, neatly dressed in dark clothes. He was the smaller and also the deadlier of the two.

"Come in, Miss Lavy," Machin said. "We've been waiting ever so long, Chen and I."

But she seemed rooted to the spot. Chen remedied that. Two steps and he was by her side. Thick blunt fingers closed around her wrist. And before she could utter a single sound his other hand was pressing her lips closed. He kicked the door shut behind him, while, with his free hand he lifted her like a sack of feathers and carried her to the overstuffed chair which only the night before Bruce had found so comfortable.

"That's a lot better, Mona," Machin said. "Now we're all comfy, you, I and Chen. Like three conspirators, eh?"

SHE swallowed. And somehow it was not alone saliva, but her fears as well. Why, she thought, they weren't here to harm her, she didn't know. But it was a certainty in her mind. They wanted something of her, that was why they were here. And when she smiled, she noticed with amusement, Machin's eyes widened slightly.

"Yes. Do make yourselves at home. Or am I too late with my invitation?" There was no answer, so she continued, "Well? Is there something you wanted? Surely you didn't break in just to shout surprise when I came home?"

It was Chen who recovered his balance first:

"*Very* nice indeed, Miss Lavy. I admire your spirit. Too bad your father hadn't the same stuff. However, we won't delve or stay long on the subject of the late Lavy. You're quite right. We didn't come to surprise you, though we *were* wondering what was keeping you.

"But we knew, of course, that you would show up. So here we are gathered. Now, Miss Lavy, we simply want the issue of *Occulti* which has the code which your father used . . ."

Well, she thought, Dale Tarrant had been right. The key lay in one of those magazines. But which one? And what good would it do her to know? Nothing of what went on in her mind showed on the smooth soft skin of her face. She continued to smile as though greatly amused by what Chen had just said.

The smile was wiped clean in an instant. Machin moved with all the speed of a snake and his hand slapping her across the mouth was like a snake's fang.

"I have no time to waste, Mona," he said in a calm low voice. "Where is the magazine?"

There was a taste of salt in her mouth. She sucked in softly and tasted blood. Her eyes never left the soft wet ones of Machin. And once more his hand struck. This time it was a harder blow, one which drew blood.

"Where is the magazine?" he asked again.

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Deliberately, with a strange joy, she let the blood escape her lips. It dripped down in a thin stream staining her chin and falling redly to the white and black print of her dress. Her eyes held an odd calm nor did they shift in the smallest degree from the brown ones trying to stare her down. There was the sound of escaping breath from Machin. He threw his palms up and shrugged his shoulders.

"A pity, Mona," he said. "I am not cruel or savage. I am so much the woman that I can only slap and claw. Yes, and sometimes screech. But Chen, here. Aah! He is different. Did you know that he is a direct descendant of Tamerlane? But how could you know that? Your father had no time to tell you that.

"Have you ever read of Tamerlane? A cruel, pitiless man. A man inured to the sufferings of humanity and not caring a hang.

"Mona, listen. I swear to you that if you don't talk, if you insist on these heroics, I shall be compelled to give you into the hands of Chen. It will be a matter of regret to me. You are very lovely, your body is a delight to the soul . . . *Look at his hands!*"

She couldn't stop her eyes from going to the hands of the Chinese. A shudder shook her frame.

"In a matter of seconds," Machin went on, "you would become a rag doll, torn, bloody, useless even for the scrap heap. There are other things Chen can do when he is aroused. The touch of flesh brings out the basest instincts in a man. Chen becomes an animal . . ."

"No! *NO!*" her voice was the high wail of all the women who have been ravaged through the centuries.

"Yes! Unless . . ."

"You've got to believe me, Machin. I don't know what you're talking about. Please. Believe me."

The two men looked at each other. A frown creased the forehead of the Chinese. He rubbed a finger thoughtfully down the length of the wide nose. There was panic in the woman's voice. Fear also. Above all, however, there was truth. She didn't know. Not so good!

"I think she is telling the truth, Machin," Chen said.

"Yes," Machin was disgusted. "I think so, too. Aah!" He slapped her again, and she fell back from the blow. The thin flow of blood stood out startlingly red against the paleness of her cheek and chin.

"Perhaps Tarrant has it," Chen said, the sudden thought spoken aloud made him rigid.

They turned once more to her. Mona was sobbing softly in a corner of the sofa. Machin jerked her close while Chen moved in to stand towering above the two on the sofa.

"Does Tarrant have it?" Machin asked.

"And where is he now?" Chen said.

"No, how can he have what I don't know exists?" Mona said. "He's probably home."

A DECISION had to be made, Machin reasoned. This fool woman was clogging the flow of destiny. She had to be removed. It wouldn't be hard. On the other hand, she was a link, however small, with her father. And with the other, Tarrant. Of course. Machin snapped his fingers. How could he have been so blind?

"I think I have an answer for one of our problems, anyway," he said to Chen. "We have the girl. We need Tarrant. How can we get him to come to us?"

But Chen was thinking ahead too. He smiled widely, his white, separated

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teeth gleaming brightly. It wasn't a pleasant smile. Mona, her frightened eyes traveling from one to the other, felt an added horror when she saw the smile.

"By telling him she needs him," Chen said. "A letter delivered by messenger, tonight even . . . Wait! I have it. Let her call him. Suddenly she screams . . . "

"Please, Chen!" Machin broke in. "This isn't a movie. That would only bring the police on the scene. Not that it matters greatly but we want as little interference as possible. At least until our plans are set. You know that. The first suggestion was best. You know what we want you to do?" he turned to Mona.

"Yes. There is paper and pen in the drum-top table," she said. Inside she breathed a sigh of relief. It was precious time they were giving her and Tarrant. Then dismay smote her. Tarrant wouldn't be home. Would these monsters wait for his return? "But I don't think he's home," she said. "He mentioned something about going to see someone."

Once more there was an interval of silence. Mona held her breath while they considered the possibilities of the new development.

"Devil take it!" Machin burst out. "Let's get her out of here first. Later we can decide what to do . . ."

She lifted her eyes just in time to see Chen's closed fist descending toward her. A merciful darkness broke on her and enveloped her in its folds with the contact of his fist with her jaw.

Tarrant floated down the stairs. At least it seemed he was floating. Of course he knew he wasn't. But that kiss! Oh man! Normalcy returned with its restraining influence when he reached the street. A neon sign in the distance seemed to be the only sign of life. The street was empty of people. Not even a car was to be seen. Broadway was just a couple of blocks over. Tarrant knew cabs rode the street quite often no matter what the hour. He started off toward the busy thoroughfare.

An all-night drug store's lights attracted his attention. Better call John, Tarrant thought. Hell. It was past two in the morning. Fella might be asleep. Might not even be in town.

"Ambassador East," said the voice.

"John Gaylord," Tarrant said.

There was a short wait, and finally a voice, drowsy, heavy with sleep, "Hel-lo?"

"John?" Tarrant asked. There was an affirmative answer. "Dale. Dale Tarrant," Tarrant said quickly. "Sorry I broke in on your sleep. But I've something darned important to talk to you about. And it can't wait for morning . . . Can't help it, John! Be up. I'm coming right over . . ."

Gaylord had an apartment overlooking the lake. Tarrant surmised Gaylord had an independent income. Certainly the salary attached to the job didn't warrant this kind of apartment. He grinned at the tall man in the silk robe who was stifling a yawn with a well-kept palm.

"I know," Tarrant said. "I'm a double-dyed jerk! And nothing can possibly be so important. But it is, John. Oh, hell! Let's brew some coffee. Maybe that'll knock the sleep out of you."

"Why must you knock the sleep out of me?" Gaylord asked even as he started for the small kitchen.

"Who knows? Maybe you'll have to holler, Hi-Ho, Silver, *Away,* when I get through talking," Tarrant said.

Gaylord had trained himself to listen without interrupting a speaker. He had a photographic mind. Words struck and were impinged on his brain. He

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could have quoted Tarrant verbatim, had he wanted. It took Tarrant a little better than an hour to tell his tale.

"A good job, Dale," Gaylord said. "Okay. I've got all the details. Now what do you want of me?"

Tarrant looked a bit stupid, staring as he did, with his mouth open and his eyes wide and lack-lustre.

Gaylord felt irritation at the other. Good Heavens! Was the man an idiot? Just what had he expected?

"What the hell do you mean, want of you? Holy whitefish bellies! Why you've got enough evidence . . ."

"Suppositions," Gaylord said. "Nothing concrete."

"Okay. Suppositions. But enough of them to warrant an investigation. If this thing is as world-wide in scope as Mona says . . ."

"That, Dale," Gaylord said, accenting her name, "is the rub. Mona Lavy says. Anything besides what the estimable Miss Lavy has told you would be more pertinent and perhaps of greater validity. Produce that and I'm your whipping boy."

"The magazine, *Occulti,*" Tarrant said in reminder.

"All right. But which one?"

"The one she's looking for at this very moment. Which reminds me. I'd better check. Mind if I use your phone?"

Tarrant let it ring. After a full thirty seconds a puzzled frown creased his brow. Surely it wouldn't take that long for her to answer. Was there something wrong? He was afraid to think. The color was drained from his face when he turned it to Gaylord who was standing at his side.

"What's wrong?" the intelligence man asked.

"I don't know. But I'm scared as hell."

Gaylord made up his mind on the instant. "Wait a second while I get something."

He returned shortly and Tarrant saw he was buttoning his double-breasted jacket. He surmised there was a holster with a gun in it under the coat. Gaylord ordered his car sent around from the garage on State Street. It was waiting for them by the time they reached the street.

TARRANT felt the speed at which they traveled by the blur of things in passing. But his eyes were blank. There was but one thought on his mind, Mona. Something had happened, or might be happening to her at that very moment. He pushed the car to greater speed, it seemed, by mental effort alone. They came to a skidding halt in front of the canopied entrance.

The clerk lifted startled eyebrows at their demand to be given a key to Mona's apartment. But the sight of Gaylord's badge instantly brought the desired key to view. The two men fairly leaped into the elevator.

There was no sign of struggle. The room was empty. But Gaylord wasn't content with its looks. He walked around, looked at the sofa, pulled at the drawers of several tables, walked into the combination library-dining room, and finally returned to Tarrant sitting dejected and frightened on the sofa.

"Find — find anything?" Tarrant asked. His eyes begged an answer he knew wasn't there.

"Something wrong somewhere," Gaylord said. "Did she use incense?"

Tarrant's brows drew down. Incense? Not that he knew of. He sniffed loudly and for the first time smelled it himself. It had a familiar odor. He brightened visibly and turned his eyes to Gaylord.

"I got it, John!" he shouted exultantly. "Gordon Chen's place reeks of

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the stuff. Oh! No . . ."

"Don't get excited," Gaylord said in a tight voice. "Incense is sold everywhere in Chinatown. Even supposing it was he. The girl isn't here. Therefore she is with him. It's a tip-off. By the way, Dale, come in here and see what you can make of this."

Dale looked at the empty spaces in the wide bookcase. He was trembling a bit. Half his mind was on Mona.

"Looks like," he began, then stopped. He rubbed with quivering fingers at his right temple, and started again, "It looks like someone took out a whole section of books or magazines. My guess is magazines. Sure. Whoever did the snatch took the file of *Occulti* her father had kept in the case."

"Precisely," Gaylord said. "Okay, boy. I think we can go to work now. H'm. Ah. There it is," he said, as his eyes fell on the phone.

Tarrant could see Gaylord in the other room but he couldn't hear what the man was saying. Nor did he know whom he was calling. He saw his head shake once and again, as though in agreement with what was being said at the other end of the phone. Then the phone slammed on the cradle and Gaylord was beckoning Tarrant to get up.

"My men will be down at Chen's in a few moments. I can't say whether we'll be in time. But we'll see. At any rate, don't act like you've given up hope."

"I haven't. But I think they'll do anything to get what they want," Tarrant said. "And I hate the thought of it."

Gaylord put an arm around the other's shoulder in deep affection. The lanky writer was one of Gaylord's favorite people. There was an underlying love of humanity in the writer's make-up, which at times was hidden by a sardonic twist of humor. The two had been friends through the years and Gaylord helped him out many times even though it meant trouble.

"Take it easy, fella," Gaylord said. "They're going to pick us up on the way to Chen's. Say! I think I saw some drinks in the other room. Go on. Pour yourself a couple . . ."

THERE were three other cars parked before Chen's place. Tarrant was quick to notice that among the agents were several Chinese. They had been waiting for Gaylord, for the moment he stepped from his car most of them fell in behind him. He gave orders in a tense low voice; so many of them to the rear, so many to stay out front. He, Tarrant and two others made for the front entrance.

"There's a buzzer by the side of the door," Tarrant said. "The clerk sleeps in one of the back rooms, I'm sure."

But no one answered the buzzer's summons. They tried again and accomplished nothing by it.

"Break it in," Gaylord said after the second try.

One of the two men who had come with Tarrant and Gaylord stepped forward and Tarrant noticed then that he had a small axe in one hand. The axe rose and fell and there was a vast splintering of glass. Once more the axe descended and again glass shattered. There was enough room for all of them to get by then.

There was no one in either of the two rooms. Yet it was evident that someone had slept and eaten in one of them. There was a cup still on the table and when Tarrant touched it he found it was still warm. There was also a plate which from the smell had had chicken on it. It, too, was empty, though the grease was still wet on it.

While Tarrant was examining the cup and plate, Gaylord and one of his

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assistants had gone through the remaining room. The intelligence chief called from the threshold of the room:

"Dale. Step in here a second."

Tarrant did as he was told and looked questioningly at the other.

"Sniff," Gaylord said.

Tarrant sniffed loudly.

"Mona was here!" he said. "That odor is from her perfume. She was wearing it today. I remember distinctly that leathery odor it had."

"I thought so too," Gaylord said. "I just wanted to make sure. Well, they've skipped . . . " There was a smashing sound from the rear somewhere and in a few seconds the rest of the squad piled into the room. ". . . Jenkins," Gaylord continued, "get the address of Aijan Machin. With a name like that he'd be the only one in the book. If he's not listed I'll talk to the head operator."

They all stepped into the store proper. Tarrant saw a crowd of curious people gathered outside. Someone had called the police on hearing all the excitement and glass breaking. There was a diminishing sound of sirens, and in a few seconds a police squad car pulled up in front of the store. Gaylord delegated one of his men to the business of explaining their presence to the police and to ask them for help in keeping the curious away. In the meantime he stood at Jenkins' side while he tried to get the address of the lamp manufacturer. After a short wait Jenkins said, "Uh, huh," and hung up. He turned a puzzled look to his chief and said:

"No phone except a business one."

Gaylord nodded somberly on receipt of the information, then called the sergeant in charge of the police squad. The station nearest Machin's offices was the first district station. This time Gaylord used the phone. The Lieutenant in charge was only too glad to cooperate. Of course he'd send a squad down. Sure they'd have axes.

"Well, here we go again," Gaylord said. "I'll leave a couple of the boys here. We'll just take Jenkins and Sui Lee along. We *might* get lucky and maybe get them there before they can get away."

AND once more they were away. The run was shorter this time. But their luck was no better. If the bird had come to roost, it had not stayed long. Once more there was a room to room search. And at the end there was nothing they could lay their hands to and say, this is Aijan Machin and this is what he does. It was remarkable how little information was to be found in the man's files.

Even Gaylord was bewildered. It was as though a phantom had done business under a name.

"H'm. Too late now for anything else except to send out a pick-up order on the trio. Tomorrow we'll get hold of the office help. Maybe one of them knows something. As for you, Dale, you're going back to my place to sleep. It looks like you could use some. About twenty-four hour's worth . . ."

Tarrant thought it was the alarm which had awakened him. He turned lazily and winked his eyes open. Suddenly consciousness returned in full and he sat erect, swept away the covers and leaped from the bed. The bed across the runner of rug was empty. His ears pricked up at the sound of a murmuring voice. Then he knew it hadn't been the clock which had awakened him, but the ring of the phone.

Gaylord, seated cross-legged on the floor was talking into it. He turned his head, saw Tarrant and grinned a welcome. The grin made Tarrant take heart for some reason. He gathered

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that whatever the news was it wasn't too bad.

"Well, Dale," Gaylord said, "I thought surely you'd sleep later than this."

"I probably would have. But the phone's ring awakened me."

"Just as well. Are you set for a plane trip?"

"Why?" Tarrant asked.

"Because we're going to Washington," Gaylord said. "I'm going to get at the bottom of this mystery."

"What about Miss Lavy?" Tarrant asked what was the most important thing on his mind.

"Which is the why of the capitol trip," Gaylord said. "Machin had no help. The elevator man told my boys he worked alone. He had given the renting agency a false address, the only address on the few papers in the office were of the building. We'll find his home address eventually, though. Right now I'm interested in other things.

"Dale. There's something peculiar going on which concerns not us alone, and I don't mean you or I. Strictly on what you told me I made inquiries of a certain source. Dale, maybe your heart throb had something on the ball." He looked at his wrist watch and whistled. "Hey! Let's get cuttin', Dale. We don't have too much time."

Gaylord elaborated during the plane ride, which was in one of the new jet-propelled army transport planes:

"You read the papers, Dale," he said. "Well, in the last year a great step was made in the direction of a universal peace. Since nineteen fifty-two the so-called big four have worked together in perfect harmony. So much so, that disarmament is an actuality.

"That, of course, is the reason for our being. I mean the security patrol. Two American scientists discovered how to harness the cosmic ray in nineteen fifty. At the same time they gave that knowledge to the entire world. Of course the atom bomb and such weapons were instantly outmoded. And at the same time because of the material they published the new weapon was made available to all nations. It was the smartest thing science has ever done.

"So disarmament became the thing and all nations followed the plan laid down by America, England and Russia. For the first time in the entire history of the world, there is a real peace because the weapons with which wars are waged have been scrapped.

"So we come to a fly in all this wonderful ointment. Rumors, strange tales of a something from the remotest section of the Himalayas, have come to our ears. Actually, there hasn't been anything we could lay our hands to and say this is what is happening, uncovered. And you came along with this strange tale. So, Dale, my friend, we're going to the Library of Congress and look into all the issues of a magazine, called, *Occulti.*"

"Yeah! I guess that's the only course open to you," Dale Tarrant said bitterly. There were lines of suffering around his mouth and crows feet in the corners of his eyes. "But me. I say the hell with all that. I just want to find Mona."

"Sure, fella," Gaylord said. "I know how you feel. But can't you see that there is no road we know of which could lead to her except through the magazine . . ."

"That's what I hate," Tarrant broke in. "You're so certain of it. What about Chen and Machin? They couldn't have disappeared into thin air. They must still be back there somewhere."

"If they are, my men will find them. There's a general alarm out for them.

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Every plane, ship, train and bus will be checked. The entire organization of the F. B. I. and secret service is at our disposal. Besides that the police of the entire nation have been notified. The country will be gone through with a fine-tooth comb."

"Then why do you say the only road open is by way of the magazine?" Tarrant asked.

"I should have said, the *best* road," Gaylord amended his statement. "The *quickest* road. Just a bit of patience . . ."

It took three days of searching and a staff of four to leaf through the hundreds of magazines before they found what they were looking for. It was Tarrant who found the passage Mona had quoted from, the passage about the seer from the Basalt Mountain. The passage, however, was from an editorial written by Lavy. The five others clustered around the magazine-strewn table and peered as best they could over Tarrant's shoulder while he read aloud.

"Yes. I remember your saying that," Gaylord said. His lean handsome face had tired lines in it now. And the wide shoulders sagged a little under the smart cut of the suit. He had divided his time between the library and the building on O Street, the building that was the web of all the services that were secret in the government.

THE only man among the four researchists, a dark-faced man whose intent flashing eyes showed an immense intelligence, said:

"Wait. The name, Ayame . . . H'm! Aha. I've got it. There's a story in this issue with an editorial note by the editor which says it's up to the reader to believe or not. Let me think. Oh, what's the difference! It won't take more than a minute to find it."

It took twenty-nine seconds precisely. The name of the story was, "The Seer of The Basalt Mountains."

"Okay, Lansin," Gaylord said, settling himself comfortably in the leather chair. "Go ahead. Read it aloud. Smith, you and Wien take notes, complete notes."

The man read the story through and when he was done there was a silence that lasted for perhaps two minutes. Gaylord broke it by saying:

"I guess that's it! Names, places and even the time, although that's ambiguous. In any event there's no question in my mind but it was a message meant for certain people.

"Smith, read back that about the, 'time stands still on the mountain . . .' "

The woman adjusted the heavy tortoise frame on her rather long nose, and read from her stenographic notes:

" 'Time stands still on the mountain. And why not. Time is the past, the present and the future all rolled into a single package. And in the great hall, directly below the bronze gong, the Chairs of the Mighty are never empty, though they are not present.

" 'The Keeper of the Lamp calls the Gamen to their tasks and they answer in the familiar phrases. It is all so clear to me. I hear the words again. How true they sounded. But the Keeper of the Flame could utter the most banal of things and make them the veriest truths. It is only in retrospect that one remembers and because he is so far away, does one think clearly on the words.

" 'They were lies. Now I see the purpose clearly. The talk of peace over the world, the talk of maintaining the peace, the talk of other's arrogance and power was but to lull us into the hypnotic state which made us such excellent subjects. It was he, the Keeper himself, who wanted power, who wanted to be the supreme ruler

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over all. The symbol of the Lamp was his hold over us. But I am a long way from the Basalt Mountain . . .'"

"Cut," Gaylord said quietly. "Okay, Smith. I got it. There's a complete description of the place and a diagram or map isn't there?"

Once more they bent close over the pages. The author of the piece had drawn a crude map showing the points of guidance for those wanting to make the pilgrimage.

"H'm," Smith sighed shaking her head. "It's in a hell of a place from the looks of this. Here," her finger stabbed at the paper. "This is Tibet. But if we scale this down or up, whichever proves better procedure, then this so-called Basalt Mountain isn't."

They all looked at her as if she had lost her mind.

"How do you figure that?" Tarrant asked.

"Because according to this map the Basalt Mountain is either within or adjoins the boundaries of the capitol of Tibet."

"So?" Gaylord put in.

"So," the woman said shaking a finger about as though she were giving a lecture, "we get back to the description of the place as given in the story, 'The mountain rose sheer against the angry waters pelting it from below, yet disturbing not a single particle of the age-old stone. As far as eye can see, the waters stretch in grey solitude, wave on wave of greyness . . .' Do I have to read more?"

They understood then. There wasn't a map they could think of which showed a body of water that large in the Himalaya Mountains. It was Lansin who broke the silence.

"THE writer speaks of an immense body of water. It doesn't show on the map. Why? Either it isn't or it is. So what made him write of it and not diagram it? Because whoever knew of it would know where it was. Who didn't, the writer believed, would never find it. Now I know these fantasy readers, or occult fans or whatever they call 'em. They'll go to any lengths to try and prove a lie or misstatement on a writer. So the map was put in for the reader's benefit. They must have received scores of letters calling the writer a liar; his map proved it. But if we forget the map and think of the story, then he can be right. After all there must be immense areas of the Himalayas which have never known the cartographer's pen."

Put that way, they realized it made sense.

"But how do *we* find it?" Tarrant asked.

"We can make a molehill out of any mountain," Gaylord said in paraphrase. "That is my job. All right folks. You've done a splendid job. Now *I've* got to get to work. Come along, Tarrant. Lansin, you and Smith report to work at my office tomorrow."

The building on O Street was the quietest beehive Tarrant had ever seen. Certainly he couldn't say, *heard*. He made a note of Gaylord's importance among the people whose work made the building their headquarters. Gaylord had an immense suite of offices on the third floor. He and Tarrant went directly to the offices from the Library.

Gaylord spoke something of what was on his mind as they rode the short distance:

"By this time my men will have a complete and detailed report on what has been going on. And maybe something on the missing trio. It's my opinion that Machin and Chen are cogs in that part of the wheel which is in America. The question I want answered is whether or not they have done

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their work. I think I know what their work was. Also what Bruce and Lavy had to do. But the report will bear that out, I hope."

The exhilaration Tarrant had felt on finding where the mysterious Refuge was and some of its mysteries cleared, had left him. Once more his mind was turned to the woman he had found and lost in two days. He had given up speculating on whether she was dead or not. He knew that had he continued to beat his brain against the stone wall of emptiness into which she and the two men had disappeared would only lead to at the very least, a nervous breakdown. Gaylord's advice was best to be followed. He could only hope that he would be allowed to go along when they sent men out.

The reports were on Gaylord's huge desk. Tarrant dragged up a chair, placed his feet on the desk and waited for the other to begin reading. Gaylord had barely begun when the telephone rang. Tarrant's feet came off the desk when he heard Gaylord say, "Yes, Mister Gordon. I'll be there shortly."

Gordon was the Secretary of State!

"Okay, keed," Gaylord said. "Come along. This is the big deal. And you're in on it. Something's brewing and the pot's about due for a royal stirring."

Even Gaylord became a little tense when he saw that the chiefs-of-staff of all the forces had been gathered in the office. And that something serious was happening could be clearly seen reflected in their faces.

"This is Mister Dale Tarrant who apprised me of the situation," Gaylord said in introduction.

PHINEAS GORDON, the new Secretary of State was a hard-bitten down-easter from Maine. He had been a career diplomat who had risen to the post of Ambassador to Russia. Shrewd and wise in the ways of politics, he was of the type England had produced in the persons of Gladstone and Disraeli. He showed little of the agitation which must have been in his mind. His narrow, long face, clean shaven and carried forward pugnaciously, was mounted on a short, lined neck. He was almost completely bald and had a habit of brushing delicately at the small remaining fringe of hair at the back of his head while he talked. He nodded in acknowledgement of the introduction and began to talk almost immediately:

"Now that you're here, Gaylord, we can get right down to facts. I have received detailed reports from all branches of intelligence and they all dovetail. There is a world emergency. Peace, our most precious commodity, is being undermined.

"To put it bluntly, someone is declaring war on the world governments."

"If I may intrude, Mister Secretary," a beribboned General broke in, "I am certain I can name the guilty party. It is . . ."

"You may *not* intrude," Gordon said sharply. "There will be no naming of names! Suspicion went out at the signing of The Covenant of Washington. Further, the security section of the U. N. has shown that *every* nation fulfilled their individual obligations. There is not a single weapon but which is in the hands of the security section. Am I right, Gaylord?"

"Exactly. General Swift," Gaylord spoke directly to the beribboned man who had spoken, "the offices of chief-of-staff of navy, army, and air force were allowed *only* under the jurisdictional control of the security section. There have been times when you have attempted to obviate some of the duties of my department. I have asked you

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"Tell us what code your father used!" he demanded roughly.

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before not to interfere. I shall make an issue of it before Mister Gordon, now, because your interference, sir, is a deliberate attempt to . . ."

"Gentlemen," Gordon interposed his personality between the two. "This is not the time for quarrels. I am perfectly aware of Swift's old-maidish outbursts. Jealousy, sirs, must be put aside in this emergency. Let me make our position clear.

"To begin with, a racial war has actually been declared in the south. Religious persecution has spread its vicious tentacles over a large part of the country. Forces are at work with which we can hardly cope unless we call an emergency. However, they are not aware that we have an intimate knowledge of the personnel at the head of these organizations. Now, sirs, a strange fact has come to light. These same forces are a part of a world-wide movement. And in some countries, they have cooperated with labor, farmers and others of the productive sections until an actual state of revolution exists. Even in Russia," the last was a pointed statement directed to Swift.

"Lately, arms have appeared among the smaller nations' revolutionists. Not the old type arms but the newest inventions of science. Where have they come from? Who is supplying these people? Those are the questions we must have answered. Gaylord, I am delegating you, in the name of and with the explicit directions from, the governments of the United Nations, to investigate this unnatural phenomena. Further, Gaylord, you have the powers which the Council placed in your hands, to stamp out these subversive influences."

TARRANT gave a silent whistle. Holy whitefish bellies. This was a declaration of war!

Gordon went on:

"I have called the chiefs-of-staff to assist you in any and every way you want in this emergency. Their every person in their organization is at your disposal."

Gaylord's face tightened into even stronger lines, deeper determination at the words.

"I am cognizant of the facts in the case, Mister Secretary," he said. "I have already begun a plan of operation. The security police have been ordered on a 'ready' basis. As it happens, I was at work on the matter when you called. With your permission, I will return."

"Very good, Gaylord," Gordon said. "A last word, gentlemen. You all must learn to live with each other, for surely you won't be able to without each other."

His point was well-taken, though Tarrant was aware it did not sit well with Swift. The three military men saluted, about-faced and left the room. But Gaylord made it a point to stay behind. There were things he wanted to know . . .

"Just how serious is the situation, sir?" he asked.

Gordon looked questioningly toward Tarrant. Tarrant's position in this hadn't been made quite clear to him. If things of great import were to be discussed Gordon wanted to make sure they would go no further than this room.

Gaylord enlightened him somewhat:

"Mister Tarrant has given my department some very important information. I have delegated certain duties of great importance to him. I would appreciate his being allowed to stay."

"Very well," Gordon said. "The situation, Gaylord, is so serious that I cannot allow even the smallest hint to appear in any of the public dissemination agencies."

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"You mean, sir, that neither the newspapers, radio nor magazines of public opinion have any idea of what is going on?" Gaylord asked in incredulous tones.

"I didn't say that," Gordon said hastily. "After all, there are agencies of supply which are established in every capital in the world. Some of them have sources of information which are as reliable as our own government's.

"But!" he exclaimed sharply. "I cannot permit these facts to come before the public. Because of the dangers involved I have asked the various publishers *not* to print anything of these things without the government's express permission."

Gaylord's lips writhed oddly. It was a habit of thought process, like the narrowing of his eyes. His mind was digesting the information Gordon had given him. Of course some of it was known to him. His agency had probably been the fountainhead of supply. He knew about the Fascist revival in England, for example. And the renascence of the Legion of Fire in France . . . H'm. It wouldn't do any harm to get other pertinent facts.

Gordon was quite willing to share them.

". . . Let me give you several instances, Gaylord. Stalin died a couple of years ago. Matter of fact it's almost two years to the day. He named a successor to take his place. To all appearances everything was as before. Molotov, Gromyko, Maisky, and others with whom we'd had dealings were still in the saddle. If it hadn't been for deviations in *internal* policy . . . H'm. Maybe it would take too long to make clear all the facts . . .

"At any rate, I'll make it a more concise picture. From out of nowhere came a man named Peter Novikoff, General Novikoff, to give him his full title. How he came to be named Commisar of public defense is something of which we have no knowledge. From that beginning of more than humble stature, Novikoff became the dictator of policy in Russia."

GOOD Heavens! Gaylord thought. These things which were supposed to be so secret were matters of public knowledge. Surely there was more to it than just that.

There was.

". . . Thus far," Gordon continued, "everything is known. Now we come to the unknown. Who are the people behind Novikoff?"

"What do you mean, sir?" Gaylord asked.

"Simply this. Suddenly, for no reason which is clear, Novikoff purged every military and naval man of note in Russia. More than a thousand of them died. And to this day no one has taken their place."

"Well," Tarrant heard himself say, "isn't that good?"

"That, sir," Gordon said, "is what we want to know. And *why* he did it?"

"I don't quite see what that has to do with us," Gaylord said, "if the continuing policy of Russia is that of peace."

"Wait," Gordon said. "I said I had a picture to draw. Perhaps when I'm through you might not see it clearly. Speaking for myself, I have the lines, to strike a phrase, at my fingertips, but how to place them so that the perspective is right, is beyond me. Let us go to another country, Spain. A couple of years ago Franco, the dictator, permitted the monarchy to return. Franco went into virtual retirement. The monarchy has been in effect since then. What we want to know is who, what and why a man named Francisco Pitarrzo has come to importance in Spain.

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"And in England, who is and what has Charles Hemain to do with government policy? And in France, Henri Bayrde? Why has a blanket of silence descended over the East? What is happening in China, Japan, all the countries of the far east? Certainly we can say that to all outward appearances nothing is happening. Then why all the secrecy they are suddenly observing? Those are the things we want you to find out, Gaylord."

Gaylord whistled thinly. What a pot they had given him. And what a *stew* was in the pot. Well, he thought, he had been told at the very beginning that there would be times such as this when he was going to wish he had never heard of the security section. They had been right. This was such a time. But all this was inside of him. Outwardly he was the same. There was nothing in his voice to show what was on his mind:

"Very well, sir. I shall place the entire agency on these matters. Good day."

"WELL, Dale, my friend," Gaylord said when he and Tarrant got back to Gaylord's office, "it looks like I won't have too much time to give you now. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course," Tarrant said heavily.

"However, I'll give you one of the best men I have. And of course you will have *carte blanche* to the use of anything you may need in your search. Jerry Lansin and you should do well together. I saw you liked him and the way he did things. He's your fella. Now I'm going to be busy like a little rabbit. Jerry's in room 423. I told him, on the side, to get to work on the case. Better get to him. He might have something . . ."

Lansin fairly radiated energy. It seemed to flow from his very fingertips as he sorted papers on his desk, fiddled with the pen, shuffled reports. His narrow, sparkling eyes held Tarrant, as he spoke with incisive voice and dramatic gestures of fingers:

"Sure, fella! We can lick this. Hell! There isn't a man, woman or mouse we can't find. I've seen it done. Done it myself, matter of fact. Now look at this thing. Report from the air arm. Let me quote; 'Check of ports reveals no strange plane check-out. Security patrol has been warned, as per instructions to be on lookout for missing woman and men. Will keep in continual comm. with office.'

"That was this afternoon while we were at the Library. Now listen to this. 'Strange jet-craft, without markings, was sighted by Lieutenant Hargerson in patrol ship, 984, at approximately 9200 hour, proceeding in southwesterly direction at approximately 750 miles per hour. Lieutenant Hargerson gave chase but was soon outdistanced . . .' This came in while you were with the Chief. I immediately alerted all stations to report after checking on any strange jetships seen.

"And here, my boy, was something I got on it. Listen. 'A report on a strange occurrence at Los Cavallos, California. Los Cavallos is near the airport of Carmel. It is a town on a rocky headland and although having no port of its own is the headquarters for a group of flying enthusiasts who have been bitten by the bug of fishing from helicopters.

" 'This morning at about four-thirty, two of these bugs, Wilson Hammond, and Josh Smith, came down to try for some early morning sport. They drove down from town which is about eight miles from the spot where they have their 'copter berthed, and drove up to the shed which houses it. They had just doused the lights of their car when

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they heard the peculiar sound of an approaching 'copter. They were made curious by the fact that there were no riding lights on the strange ship. They waited and heard the 'copter descend not too far from them. They could not swear to it though both claim a positive feeling that what they heard was a woman's voice among those who came from the ship. At any rate, these strangers walked in the direction of Smith and Hammond. Suddenly there was a silence. And after a short while a groaning sound.

" 'With a suddenness that was electrifying, a whole section of the ground lifted, and a plane sped, as though driven from the very bowels of the earth, straight for the heavens. Both Smith and Hammond agree that it was a super-jet job . . .'

"Now what do you think, Tarrant?"

"It's Chen, Machin and the girl!" Tarrant breathed aloud. "But what are we doing here? Let's get out there, man!"

"All in good time," Lansin said grinning. "I've got some of the boys down there now, looking the ground over. Do you have any clothes with you that you could rustle into a small bag? If it's what I think, we're going on a long trip."

"No I don't," Tarrant said. "But hell! It won't take me more than an hour to get what's necessary. Where shall I meet you?"

Lansin gave him directions, shook hands, and turned back to the papers on his desk. Tarrant couldn't help the smile which came to his lips, even though the uncertainty of Chen's and the other's intention to Mona still remained in doubt. The point was she was still alive . . .

MONA LAVY stretched her cramped muscles wearily. It had been a long ride. And an uncomfortable one. The helicopter had not been built to accommodate four people. Chen was as large as any two ordinary men. But the ship had speed beyond the usual kind of its type. And the trip across the continent hadn't taken too many hours.

She looked about but couldn't see more than a few feet in front of her, the darkness was that intense. She knew there was water nearby. Probably the ocean, she reasoned. She could hear the booming sound of surf beating against the rocks. There was also a salt tang to the air. Chen and Machin didn't allow her too much time for the relaxing of her tied-up muscles. The pilot should have the ship ready, they knew.

Machin placed the infra-red goggles on the narrow bridge of his nose. Ah! There was the signal light.

"I see it, Chen. Better carry the girl. And make sure her lips are covered. We don't want any interference at this stage of the game."

Machin took the lead. The ground was grassy, level. He removed the goggles and walked in a straight line for the spot where he had seen the light. Behind him, and carrying Mona as if she were an infant in his arms, Chen trudged in Machin's footsteps. They hadn't far to go.

"Ah," a voice came from the darkness a few feet to their right. "This way."

It was a man, kneeling on one foot. Mona couldn't talk; Chen had one hand covering her mouth. But her eyes saw the man press downward at a lever. And before her very eyes the earth opened in two sections. An underground hangar!

"Quickly," the kneeling man said. "The pilot and co-pilot are on board. Get in."

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It was a large ship, she noticed, as Chen and Machin raced down the short flight of steps leading to the ramp on which the ship rested. The hatch swung open. It took them a few seconds only to get on board. And as though the pilot had been but waiting for their arrival, there was a flick of his fingers and like a burst of thunder, a roaring sound came from the tail of the ship. Mona and the other two were thrust backward against the wide seats. She had a last look downward and saw the lights of a small town below. Then there was utter darkness.

It did not last long. Perhaps an hour. Only there was no dawn. Mona realized that they were flying so high that the transition had to be that complete. Suddenly the sun was an immense ball of flame low on the horizon. Below there was a huge area of blue water. It stretched as far as the eye could see. She dimly, through the morning haze, was able to see the configurations of a coastline. California, she thought. Then it too disappeared from view and there was only water below. Somehow, and with a suddenness that was like shock, her eyes closed and she was in sleep. She hadn't known sleep since the day before . . .

An ear-splitting series of explosions awakened her abruptly from the sleep. She looked down in bewilderment. Desert. A vast stretch of sand . . . No. Not quite. For there, perhaps a mile away was a huge desert encampment. Then the plane was shooting in against the sand with terrific speed. There was a grinding sound as the wheels slid hard against the grained surface of the sand, a slipping motion and silence and stability settled over the ship.

"This is the end of the first part of the journey," Machin said. He stood over her shoulder. "We leave the ship here."

This time there was no supervision over her. Machin and the huge Chinese left the plane first. Mona followed wearily, wondering when she wound find rest. Every bone ached and cried for peace. Slowly, with dragging feet, she followed the two men from the plane.

ASTONISHMENT made her forget her weariness as she stepped from the ship. A brisk, chill wind blew strongly against her, driving particles of sand into her face. She saw for the first time the features of the land on which they had come to rest. It was an immense desert plateau. On all sides huge peaks lifted snowy faces to the sky. Her eyes turned away from their upward look and gave attention to what was on the level.

They narrowed on seeing a large cloud of dust approaching. She was able to make out what it was that was at the center of the dust cloud, a vast number of horsemen. As though in agreement with her thoughts, Machin said:

"Emir Faz-Hamid did not waste too much time."

There must have been a thousand of them, Mona thought, as the horsemen descended on them from all sides. Her ears were deafened by the wild shouting of these desert tribesmen. She saw them as in a distorted mirror. Wild-looking, unshaven, tall, bronzed, smelly . . . Then there was a deep voice giving greetings in a foreign tongue, to which Machin and Chen replied in the same language.

She saw a bearded face, sullen black eyes, a cruel beak of a nose, thin lips like the slit below an eagle's beak. The figure was wrapped in a burnoose which dragged on the sand. The man was extremely tall, topping Chen's unusual

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height by several inches. Then the deep fierce eyes looked in her direction and she felt a wild surge of fear take hold of her heart. Those eyes seemed to say, if I could but possess you . . .

Whatever was said was said quickly. Several of the men took the whites up behind their wild shaggy mounts. Mona found herself behind one of the tribesmen who had a particularly vile smell. But all thoughts were wiped from her mind when the ride toward the encampment she had seen in the distance, began.

They rode without restraint, madly, not caring who heard them, screaming their brazen cries at the tops of their voices. The dust rode along with them, enveloping horses and men in its grey-tan envelope. Fear mounted in Mona's breast until it was an intolerable ache. She wondered how long she could hold out before she turned into a screaming idiot. But to all terror there is an end, she somehow felt. And though in this particular instance it was longer than she dreamed it would be, it came to that end.

The van of the troop came to the edge of the encampment, and, still without slackening speed, continued their mad pace until they arrived before the Emir's own tent, a vast stretch of vari-colored cloth a full ten yards across the roof.

Mona collapsed to her knees the instant the horseman dropped her to the sand. She heard a voice say something, felt rough hands pull her erect. Then blessed unconsciousness overcame her. She didn't hear the Emir, even though she would not have understood the words:

"My women will care for her. Now Gamen Machin and Chen. We have things to talk of . . ."

Servants brought steaming cups of strong black coffee to them as the three men sat cross-legged on huge cushions set in a narrow triangle on the carpeted floor, and after the coffee, sweetmeats. Chen and Machin knew the custom was to eat first, with gusto, making sure they belched loudly. The talk would begin when the Emir finished his last mouthful.

"THEN the time has come, eh?" the bearded giant said. He belched loudly again, showing stained crooked teeth.

Machin had the sort of face which might be called, wrinkle-proof. The color was even, an olive bordering on tan. The skin was so fine it was almost feminine in its texture. Right now it looked a little the worse for wear.

There were tiny crow's-feet at the corners of the slant eyes, sweat had dried on the forehead and had brought to light faint lines of wrinkles. The mouth looked petulant. Machin, it had to be admitted, did not like long voyages by plane. Chen, on the other hand, looked as though he had enjoyed every moment of the journey. His eyes sparkled and his every sense seemed alive to what was going on about him, to every word spoken.

"So the time has come," Faz-Hamid said again in a low, reflective voice.

"Yes!" Machin may have been tired but his voice was incisive, to the point. "I am depending on you to get us to the edge of the sea . . ."

"It will be done," the Emir said in casual tones. "Must we act in haste?"

"Than no action, haste," Machin said.

The wide, thin shoulders of the bearded man heaved under the wrappings of cloth. "So. I am but a servant of the Keeper. If he desires haste, he shall have it. We leave tonight . . ."

"Tonight?" Chen asked. "But night-

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fall cannot be more than an hour or so away. Why tonight?"

The thin lips of the man they were facing became even thinner. Machin's eyes glinted sparks of anger. He knew Faz-Hamid had spoken as he did to put Machin in his place. There was no reason for leaving that evening. If for no reason other than the girl was completely knocked out. She could never make the trip to the sea. It must be fifty miles away, at least. And the only means of transportation was by horse.

"Not tonight," Machin said deliberately, keeping his voice on an even level.

The bearded lips smiled. Faz-Hamid's voice was smooth as silk:

"Tonight! Otherwise in a week."

This time Chen cut Machin short as he started to say something:

"Wait, Aijan! There are times when your impetuous tongue clacks without thought behind it. Perhaps there is a reason for the Emir's staying tonight. We *are* in a hurry. There is no question of it. But if there is something which we should know, something which makes our departure imperative tonight . . ."

"Only a Holy War. The heathen must be destroyed. Tomorrow's dawn brings the end of the fast of Hashem. I beg your forgiveness for not explaining the lack of food. But coffee is the utmost in beverages and sweetmeats in food, which can pass our lips . . ."

But Machin could no longer control himself:

"The Keeper demands our presence as quickly as possible. Holy Wars can wait for *his* pleasure. Tomorrow night is as well as next week. I say we leave then."

". . . I have not the power to restrain you," Faz-Hamid was the essence of politeness. His long rather dirty hands folded about each other and moved in rocking motion. "The dawn brings release from Hashem. Destiny has woven a pattern of swords over my head. The Keeper has inhabited the flesh of my body with the soul of my ancestor. He has done so for the single reason that I shall lead my people once again. I would wait until the end of the week. For tomorrow comes the strength of the men I lead, their doing or undoing. Now I must beg to be excused. Fatima has a want of her Lord and Master . . ."

"It is we who must ask pardon," Chen said, matching the suavity of tones of the bearded giant. "We have inhabited the flesh of ordinary mortals, and, I fear, some of their weaknesses. Surely it must have been those which blinded us to the path, the will and the deed. Go, mighty Emir. The morrow can bring not alone the light of the sun but also the light of reason which has become dull within us . . ."

MACHIN masked his anger as best he could while one of the Emir's servants escorted the two to the tent which was to be their shelter and home. He could barely wait the servant's departure.

"Have you lost your mind, Chen?" he screeched in a falsetto. "Has he forgotten . . .?"

"Oh, stop that talk!" Chen said with impatience at the other. "Do you think *tauatu* is our province alone? Have you forgotten Emir Faz-Hamid is but the re-incarnation of one of the mightiest men who ever lived? Do you think he speaks of his own will when he says the Holy War is to begin? But you crossed him in your high-minded manner. I'll wager he was going to tell us that he leads his men in preliminary skirmish. Tomorrow, let me do the talking. I, at least, can match his man-

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ner."

That something of great endeavor was in the wind was instantly apparent to Chen and Machin, as they stepped from the tent just after the break of dawn. The vast tent city seemed alive with men who had but a single purpose in view. To ride up and down the narrow avenues between the tents and scream their war cries at the tops of their lungs.

The men were not alone in showing that they were to go on the march against the enemy. The women, too, had a place in the sun allotted to them by their leader. With the help of the children, they were dismantling the tents, placing the personal belongings, cooking utensils, and articles small enough to be carried, on the backs of shaggy ponies provided for that purpose. They were the camp followers, the women who were as much a part of the army as were the horses and arms of the warriors.

It was the din, the sound of the women screaming to their children, *at* the ponies, the greater screams, hoarser, wilder, more ferocious of the men, which had awakened Mona. She struggled erect and ran to the closed tent flap and parted it. She had slept the sleep of the dead. Now she was wide awake, and a frightened woman again.

She heard a voice behind her and turned to see one of the women in whose charge she had been placed. The woman, enveloped in what appeared to be an immense shawl, was both calling to her, and, as though understanding that the girl could not know what she was saying, motioning with her hands for Mona to come away from the tent opening.

Mona turned, and head bent low, walked back to her bed of pillows. She sat down and waited for fate to happen to her. Nor was she long in waiting. A man appeared in the opening, called a hoarse something to the woman. Immediately, the woman stepped to Mona's side and reaching down, hauled the girl to her feet. The woman gestured with finger and thumb for Mona to follow the man.

The guard led her to the elaborate tent of Emir Faz-Hamid. She came in on the tail end of what had evidently been a discussion of the goal of Chen and Machin.

". . . I will have twenty of my men accompany you," Faz-Hamid was saying. "You will pass through country which is usually of little danger. However, I have heard reports of wandering bandits . . ."

"Will twenty men be enough?" Machin asked.

"Twenty of my men will be," the Emir said boastingly. "Enough for a hundred of the kind of jackal you might meet. Now, if you will excuse me, my men await my coming. Rham Hashid here, will act in my stead. He knows precisely what to do."

And with that, Faz-Hamid rose to his full height, bowed to the two men, kissed the finger tips of his right hand, and left without further words.

Chen, who had observed the girl's entrance from the corner of one eye, turned to her and said:

"Well, Miss Lavy, it looks like we're in for another journey. This one will be short, however. And, I assure you, the last leg of our trip will be the most pleasant."

Machin said nothing but regarded her through narrowed, tight glance. It was hard to judge what lay behind those closed lids. Nor could she decipher the grin on the small lips.

The man Faz-Hamid had designated as his representative suddenly barked something to Chen. Mona jerked an eyebrow in the direction of Chen and

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waited for a translation. Instead, Chen stepped to her side, took her elbow, and said:

"We're off. Too bad I didn't bring my riding habit. This is going to be on horseback."

FAZ-HAMID had evidently told Rham Hashid to make sure they were well-guarded, for the men rode in a fairly tight circle about them. A cool wind blew; the sun was still low on the horizon. The wind had a feel of salt water in it, as though it had come all the way from the Pacific thousands of miles away. Slowly, the mountains rose from out of the morning mists and showed their jagged, frightening tops to the riders. Mona could not help but stare about her, open-mouthed, as the wonders of this foreign world unfolded themselves to her.

Strange desert flowers showed strange blooms, some tall as a tree, others dwarf size. Now and then they sighted animals, but always the animals ran at sight of the horsemen. But for the most part there was only sand, level or dune. And slowly the dunes increased in size until after several hours they seemed riding in a valley set between sand mountains. The valley was wide and level-floored, so that they seemed to ride on a soft carpet of sand.

The sun rose. Higher and higher until it was a blazing ball of fire bent on burning them to death. The heat was intolerable. The girl understood, then, why the men wore so many wrappings. As the sun climbed higher, she saw them wrap their faces in the garments until at zenith they showed only their glittering eyes.

Mona's mouth became dry as the inside of a persimmon. Her lips cracked in the intense heat and after a while swelled until they were unrecognizable. The desert swam before her eyes. She tried to keep them closed to a slit, but that made it worse for the glare of the sand seemed to center itself in the narrow space between the lids.

Chen must have sensed it and felt pity for her suffering. He also, despite his immense strength, was beginning to wonder how long he could hold out. He managed early in the forenoon to remove his kerchief from his trouser pocket and had tied it bandana fashion around his head. He reined his horse in close to hers and said:

"How do you feel?"

She tried to talk but her lips only cracked further at the effort. They started to bleed, but so intense was the heat the blood dried almost instantly. Chen didn't hesitate a second. The kerchief was whipped from his head. It was large enough so that she was able to envelope almost her entire head in it.

It was Machin, oddly enough, who seemed to revel in the heat. His whole being seemed to glow in a kind of revival of spirit, as though heat was his natural element. He disdained the use of a handkerchief or any kind of wrapping. The hotter it got the more his eyes glittered in satisfaction, the straighter he sat on his mount. Even the men of Faz-Hamid noticed it. And though the three who were strangers could not see their eyes, they showed fear. For this was the desert. And the sun was stronger than any being. It could do worse than kill. It could drive the sense from a man's head, the water from his very body, and shrivel one to a screaming maniac.

The sun's rays had barely started to slant when the lead rider called something from where he rode, some ten yards in advance of the rest. Chen turned a grinning countenance in Mona's direction and said:

"Land, ahoy! An oasis. Keep your chin up."

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The words meant nothing to the girl. She was in a state of numbness approximating unconsciousness. The strangest thoughts managed to struggle through her brain. She wondered who had taken over her column. She wondered what had happened to that very nice man, what was his name . . .? Oh, yes, Tarrycloth, Tarrycloth Robe, of course. She giggled aloud. Her editor would have liked an article on anyone called Tarrycloth Robe. Now what was this huge idiot beside her saying . . .? Oasis? What had she to do with oasis? Did he think he was a reincarnation of Valentino, the good old Sheik? And speaking of *chic*, how could a girl keep up appearances with all this frightful sand blowing about?

CHEN caught her just in time. He saw her sway in the saddle and reached out with one of his immense hands and held her about the waist while he reined his horse in until the two beasts were racing wither to wither. He held her that way until the green palms swept past them and the cool grass was the carpet instead of the golden sand.

An instant later Rham Hashid was bellowing orders, and the group of riders slid their mounts to a halt and leaped from the saddles. They moved about quickly, each, from the way they worked, appointed to an individual task. Some began to draw water from the well which was the integral part of the oasis, others taking care that the horses were fed, and still others hurried to the building of fires so that the food they carried in their saddle bags would be warm.

Of all this Mona knew nothing. Chen carried her from her horse, placed her in the shade of a wide-branched palm, and left her to hurry back a few seconds later with a gourd of the cool water from the well. Only Machin showed no interest. He moved like a shadow in the wake of Rham Hashid. Though the others stared with hot, curious eyes at the spectacle of the huge Chinese ministering to the white girl, Machin wanted only to be with the subchief.

"How long do we stay here?" Machin asked.

"Only for the time it takes to feed the bellies of my horses and men," Hashid replied.

"Good! It has been a long time since last I was through here. Then we came by camel from Tibet . . ."

"The long way, eh?" Hashid said. "It is shorter and quicker now. Soon after we leave here, you will see the caravan route of old. Aah! My men have the food prepared. Let us eat."

Not for a second did Chen leave the side of the girl. He had been frightened when she did not respond immediately to the cold application of water which he had placed against her hot forehead. But by the time the food was ready for the serving she had come out of the daze. She could only stare at him in silent wonder. Why was he showing this consideration to her? But Chen only smiled to the question in her eyes and fed her as though she were a child. And later, when the men went to bring the horses in, he demanded a water bag for her and filled it full of the delicious water.

Only this time, when they rode off again, he rode by the side of Machin, as he had done in the beginning.

Once more the sand mountains and heat took them to their bosom. But now the smell of water was unmistakeable, and the horses went with shining eyes and dilated nostrils, as though they, too, knew the journey would soon be at an end. As sudden as the shift from desert day to night, was the

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shift from bright sunlight to grey gloom.

Chen looked up and saw again the strange phenomena of clouds so low and thick they obscured the sun. And instantly it was cool. But still the sea was not in sight. The mountains still stretched their dark tan sides to either flank, and still the wide floor of sand was a golden snake squirming between the mountains. It seemed never to stop.

Then for an instant they came to a rise and from between the foreshortened hills was caught a vast stretch of gleaming grey waters. It was only a glimpse, then the road curved again and the vision was lost. But it was enough. Once more the savage voices rose in the wild war cries. The brown wiry hands beat at the flanks of the horses spurring them to greater speed. The goal lay just ahead . . .

THE ambush was perfect. The view of the sea was cut off completely. There was only the great dun-colored flank of the mountain in one instant and in the next an immense stretch of sand which leveled down to the shore. The road widened until it merged with the shore line. But before it did, it narrowed until it was barely wide enough for perhaps six riders to ride abreast. The first six were permitted to go through. Then suddenly, ropes, which had been attached to trees, stretched their taut lengths across the path, and horses and men fell in screaming confusion to the ground.

Luckily for Chen, Machin and the girl they were in the rear. They managed to rein their horses in. But it was only a respite to what followed. Men, garbed in strange accoutrements leaped from hiding places in the sand and fell upon the fallen riders. Some, with flashing swords, hamstrung the horses, and as the riders fell, they were quick prey to the already blood-stained swords.

Rham Hashid and his men were killed to the last man. There were a few who gave a good account of themselves before death wove its trap for them. But for the most part they died like stock animals die, with a knife stuck in their gullets and the red blood pouring out to crimson the neutral sand.

The three looked down at the circle of their captors. In each mind was a different thought.

. . . Is this the end of the path to glory? Machin thought.

. . . There is no mercy in their eyes, Mona thought.

. . . H'm. Mongols. The swords, the shields, those round hats and leather bucklers. Mongols surely, was the strange thought which went through Chen's head.

It was he who broke the silence:

"Which of you is the leader?" Chen asked.

A stocky man, broad-shouldered, wide-set, whose face was dominated by a pair of coal-black eyes gleaming in fierce glance, looked up at Chen and said:

"Who is it speaks in the ancient tongue?"

"Are you the *tenga?*" Chen parried the question with another.

"Aye."

"Good! I am Tam Lani Gurra," Chen said. "Do you know of me?"

The *tenga's* eyes widened in wonder. Had he heard of him? The name was as familiar as his own mother's. But what was Tam Lani Gurra doing in the company of these hated bandits? The *tenga's* eyes narrowed again in suspicion.

"Names and words come easily. Prove it," he said.

Chen smiled at the suspicion in the

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man's voice. The other two looked queerly at him, Machin wondering what Chen was driving at and the girl puzzled at his attitude, and wondering why they had been saved.

"Take us to the *tenga-yo,*" Chen said. "To him will I offer the proof."

The Mongol warrior shook his head in satisfaction. If this man were Tam Lani Gurra, there would be honor heaped on his head. If not, death had been shoved aside only for a small moment. The *tenga* barked an order to his men and in a moment they scattered to return in a little while with horses. Chen and the others saw then that the Mongols had hid their horses behind clumps of bushes which grew in scattered clumps at the edge of the smaller dunes.

"It is not far," the *tenga* said.

Nor was it. Perhaps a three mile ride overall. Nor was it a large encampment. But there were no women here. Chen reasoned that it was a raiding party whose sole purpose was to strike and disappear, to strike again at some other point. Women would only be in the way. Even the tents were of temporary construction, cloth laid on a skeleton framework.

MOST of the men were there. The word of their coming had been sent ahead by the *tenga*. They passed curious glances among themselves as the three rode in the midst of the others to what was evidently the leader's tent. Not that it was more elaborate than the others, as the Emir's had been, but simply that it seemed to be the focal point for the activities of the camp.

The *tenga* dismounted and shoving the flap aside entered the tent. He reappeared in a short while and at his heels moved a man, who, from the actions of the rest, was their leader. At sight of him Chen leaped from his horse and stepped forward to meet him. There was something different in Chen's attitude, now. He had always given the impression of a great good nature, even though one felt that there was a great wild strength hidden in the huge breast. Now he moved like an animal, lithely, alertly, and with an authority which brooked no questioning.

"I am Tam Lani Gurra," Chen said in the language of the ancient Mongol world. "Know me by the sign I bear . . ."

Suddenly he ripped his shirt open and the two facing him bent low at the waist at the sight of the mark in the flesh. Neither Machin or the girl could see what it was he had shown them for his back was to them. But it was more than enough for the two Mongols. Not only did they bend in obeisance, but they began a slow backward movement, still bent low, until they disappeared behind the tent flap. Chen followed them.

He was gone for a few moments. When he returned, he remounted his horse, and said to his companions:

"They will take us to where the boatman is expecting us. Do not fear. No harm will come to us."

But Mona wasn't afraid. There was no room left any more for fear. The sun and the savagery of this strange world which was so close in time to the world she had left only a few hours ago, had drained all her fear from her. Now she wondered in a sort of dull apathy what was to be the next step in this drama . . . And, as an afterthought, what Dale Tarrant was doing . . .

"WHAT'S taking them so long?" Tarrant asked in irritation.

"Take it easy, fella," Lansin said. He stood near the tail of the jet-ship,

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by his side the pilot and co-pilot.

Tarrant grunted sourly, and watched the white-coated men place boxes on board the ship. They were awaiting clearance from the port. And the orders had not arrived yet. Other orders had to be sent simultaneously to other ports and ships of the patrol. For this was not just highly secret, it was a possible life or death matter for a whole world. But only Gaylord, Lansin and Tarrant knew that.

Lansin had immediately communicated his findings to Gaylord who set wheels in motion to take them to the place of their destiny. Planes and men had to be alerted. Stations throughout the world had to be told of their coming. And the vast machinery of the security section had to be set in motion for any emergency which might arise.

But of the reason for all this, not a single word had been allowed out.

At last Lansin and the two with whom he was talking in low tones, were through. They came forward and Lansin and Tarrant followed them aboard.

"The others should be here in a very short while," Lansin said pleasantly. He seemed completely at ease. Not by the smallest sign did he show anxiety or a disturbed mind. He wore a suit of coveralls, just as Tarrant did, a suit made especially for this flight. There were great hidden pockets in which were placed foods, highly concentrated and in pill form. There were flasks of specially treated water; there were two holster-pockets in which reposed two pistols, the latest development and the most secret, of the armament board which was established just for the use of the patrol. No government was permitted entry to its records. And its working were absolutely secret. As a matter of strict record, only Gaylord knew just what was being done in their laboratories.

JUST as Lansin said, in a very short while three other men showed up, one of them a Chinese. Tarrant was reminded of Chen. For Hu Lom Teng was built along the same lines. He was a much younger man also.

"Hu knows just about every dialect we might run across after we land. The others, Dale, are Larry Holz and Tim Oregon, our technical team. They'll be in charge of communications and whatever mechanical needs we might find useful."

Tarrant shook hands all around.

Lansin then explained who and what Tarrant was and the reason for his being on the flight . . . "Now," he said in closing, "from here on in it's a team. There's going to be tough sledding later. Of that there's no question. So we can't get to quibbling. As you know, I'm boss. But that's only because someone has to give the orders. Straight?"

The three and the pilot and co-pilot said, "Straight."

"Okay. Looks like orders are coming in. Let's get moving, then," Lansin said.

He was right. An orderly came running up, climbed on the stub wing and handed the pilot a manila envelope. The pilot ripped the envelope open, glanced quickly at the contents, shook his head and turning to Lansin, said:

"Got it. Belts, men."

Tarrant's breath ran short and hard as the pilot fiddled with the controls. But the instant the roar of the jets blasting shocked his eardrums, he relaxed. For a single instant the land, the buildings, the whole landscape was a blur of motion. After that there was only the pale blue sky and the grey-white of clouds. He knew that they were traveling at an incredible speed. He could feel it in his belly. But speed was the essence of their flight. That was why the fastest plane in the world,

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the security pursuit job, was picked for them.

The whole flight, Tarrant had been told, would take only an hour, so great would be their speed. Their place of landing was secret, known only to Lansin who had plotted their course. Even the pilots knew of it only as a spot on a specially prepared map. But Lansin knew they were going to be landed on the shore of a sea. From the shore they would be able to see the Basalt Mountain.

There was but one catch to the whole deal. The landing would have to be made by parachute. And though Lansin, Hu, and the other two knew all the intricate details of parachuting from high speed planes, Tarrant was a tyro at it. And tyros got hurt, usually fatally.

Lansin glanced at Tarrant from the corner of an eye. At least the man was at ease. There were courage and resolution in those grey eyes. Lansin's shoulders heaved in a tight, small shrug. Perhaps there was no need to worry. In any case, it wouldn't be long. He glanced out of the window on his side, and saw the configurations of an immense mountain chain in the distance. They were flying so high he could see little of the landmarks below.

The mountains grew in height with startling rapidity. Then they were in the foothills, which in themselves, were mountains. But not yet the majestic Himalayas. Soon, though. For already the speaker was alive:

"Watches, gentlemen . . . One minute. Get ready . . ."

They had adjusted their watches to coincide with the ones of the pilot and co-pilot. Now five heads moved toward the escape hatch in the center of the floor. It was lifting . . . Below a sea of clouds seemed to beckon a welcome on its fleecy bosom.

". . . Set," came the word.

". . . *GO*!"

And five bodies plummeted downward into the grey-white masses below.

They were the strangest clouds. Their masses stretched for an interminable distance. Tarrant knew the plane traveled in the stratosphere but the pilot had brought it down to the thirty thousand foot mark just for their take-off. Higher than that and they would have had to use oxygen masks. Even in the few seconds which elapsed between signals, a cold that was almost unbearable gripped them tightly. Tarrant had been advised to count ten befor pulling the cord. He followed instructions to the letter, making sure there was an interval between counts.

WHEN the chute opened, he was jerked back and up with a force which seemed to tear his arms from their sockets. Then the pressure let up and he was in an immense swing which had a motion that was pleasantly invigorating. He relaxed now that the pressure was off and looked about. But the clouds hid everything. Not for too long, though. Soon he was through them, as were the rest, he discovered.

They seemed spaced at regular levels and all at the same height. It would make things easier for the landing, which one downward look told them might not be to their liking. For far below them they saw the stormy surface; white caps made odd asterisks in the blue waters. Tarrant tried to do as Lansin had told him to, pull at the straps and in that way give direction to his descent.

But because he was not used to it he pulled sometimes in a direction opposite to what he was supposed to and at other times, ineffectually. It was only good fortune which allowed them all a safe landing on land. For as they

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were at about a thousand feet a strong sudden wind came up.

The land seemed so far below. Now it was rushing up at Tarrant with express train speed. Thoughts rushed through Tarrant's mind, relax, keep your knees bent and your feet high, try to land as limber-muscled as possible. Good luck held up for him. He landed on sand, level sand, which cushioned the shock completely. And there was almost no breeze to speak of. The chute collapsed about him, a billowing cloud of soft, strong-as-steel envelope. And for once his fingers were not thumbs as he threw off the harness.

He arose, shook himself and looked about. He breathed a sigh of relief. They had all landed safely. The farthest was not more than ten yards off. In a few moments they were together.

"So far so good," Lansin said. He was looking out over the grey expanse of water. It stretched as far as their eyes could see without a single break which could signify land might be there.

"No wonder no one has ever seen this place," Tarrant said. "With those clouds hiding the view from above and those mountains from any other direction. Well, we've just been lucky."

"Yeah," Lansin said. "Now what? How do we get transportation? I'm afraid we're out of touch with the right people."

"Get down!" Oregon hoarsely cried.

They acted first, questions could come later. Besides, there was an urgency in his voice which could not be denied.

They fell flat and looked toward Oregon who was pointing with a hand flat against the sand. They saw the oddly-dressed group of men debouching from a cleft in one of the immense sand dunes.

"Tartars!" Hu whispered. "And dressed as they used to be a thousand years ago . . ."

They were on horseback, small shaggy ponies that looked as if they couldn't last an hour of riding. Their looks, Lansin and the others knew, were deceiving. For these desert bred horses could outlast any other kind.

There were a hundred of them at least. Their spears bore small pinions which fluttered colorfully in the small breeze and from their saddles lights flashed from the steel of their curved swords. They were headed for a spot in an opposite direction from where the five lay.

THE five men followed them until they reached the very edge of the shore. There, they dismounted. And for the first time the five saw that not all of these men were dressed alike.

For among them were three who were dressed differently.

"It's Mona," Tarrant breathed in a gusty whisper to Lansin who lay nearest to him. "And Chen . . ."

"And I guess the short dapper guy is Machin," Lansin said.

"Hey. Look!" Hu called to others. He had left off looking at the Tartars and had bent his gaze to the water. He had seen that they too were looking out over the grey stretch of water. And he wanted to know why. He saw it then.

Even Lansin, who seemed so completely lacking in verve, gasped at what he saw coming in on the water.

It was a boat, but such as he'd never seen before. Whoever had designed it had done so with one eye on speed and the other on unusual design. It had huge curving fins which stuck up out of the water line for several feet. In fact it looked like an immense cigar with a pair of arms attached to it. But it was the speed of the thing which amazed them. It came straight for the

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shore, then suddenly swept about in a huge circle as though the occupants wanted to observe who were waiting for them.

Machin and Chen ran to the water's edge and began to wave their arms about, gesturing for the boat to come in. And once more it did, this time to come almost up on the sand. It had no sooner come to a stop when the upper part of the strange craft opened up into halves. These proved to be the decks. For very soon afterward a number of men came out from below and arranged themselves on the long and narrow surfaces.

The five could hear the voice of Machin call:

"A boat! Send a small boat. It's too far to wade."

As though in immediate answer several of the crew disappeared again into the vitals of the ship, to re-appear a few seconds later, on their shoulders a narrow craft which resembled a racing shell. This was let down into the water and several of the crew got into it.

"We've got to get on that boat," Lansin said determinedly.

"But how?" Tarrant whispered.

"Rush 'em," Hu said. "If we could get close enough we could force them to take us along."

Lansin shook his head to that. That wouldn't work if for no other reason than the one involving a physical struggle. One of them might get hurt. Or worse, the girl might get hurt. Yet how else was it to be done? Time was running out for them.

Already the long slim boat was in the water. Two of the crew scrambled down the sloping sides of the mother craft and found places in the smaller boat. Even from where they were lying they could see the sudden turmoil of water at the bow of the slim craft, and the wake which formed at the stern. They had to act now . . .

But that was why Gaylord had chosen Lansin for the command. He had the capacity for emergency action.

"Their attention is to those on shore," he said in quick accents. "These suits we have on are waterproof. Swim to the far side of the ship. There must be a means of ingress."

LIKE white snakes they crawled on their bellies to the water, slithered in, and with long sure strokes began to swim for the long slim vessel riding the swell only a hundred feet from shore. For them it was a longer distance. They had to come around from a side which would hide them from those aboard. And once again luck was on their side.

Those on board had eyes only for what was transpiring on shore. And although the racing craft took only a couple of seconds to reach the three waiting for it, more than just a few seconds passed until the talk was over and they came aboard.

By that time, Lansin and his companions had reached their goal. Just as Lansin had figured there was a narrow steel ladder attached to the rounded side. One by one they began the stealthy climb aboard. The attention of those on board was directed to the slim craft racing in to the mother ship.

For the first time Lansin couldn't give an order. Now would be the moment when the training of Gaylord's men would bear fruit. For they had only seconds in which to act. Even Tarrant acted as though he too had been a part of their team for a long time. It was sheer instinct which made him draw the oddly shaped pistol from its holster deep in the pocket. It was a covered pocket made especially for the occasion which had arisen, that the wearer might have to swim.

They were five ghost-shapes tread-

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ing on silent rubber-sod feet to the hatchway yawning before them. Lansin, in the lead, came to the lip of the hatch, his eyes narrowly watching the crew which was still on deck. He had seen several of them disappear below, while he was swimming. Now there were nine men standing there, eyes peering into the sudden gloom which was descending. Night was falling swiftly. It was a something on which Lansin was banking. Nor would it take long. Already the water was beginning to show that slate look.

Lansin peered into the depths below. There was another ladder strung from the steel side. Without an instant's hesitation he turned and motioned for the rest to follow. It was amazing that they weren't seen. But the crew had eyes only for the approaching craft, for it was almost alongside by now. Tarrant was the last to go. Murmuring a silent prayer to the goddess of fortune, Tarrant took the first step. He counted the rungs as he descended. Ten of them. He started to say eleven and a hand gripped his ankle and a voice whispered sibilantly:

"Easy."

It took a second or so for his eyes to accustom themselves to the darkness which was all around them. Then he saw his companions grouped closely together only a few feet from him. He saw an arm lift and knew it was Lansin wanting him. He slid over and Lansin threw an arm over his shoulder and drew his head close and whispered:

"There's a hatchway just a few feet over. We're going to crash in. Keep your gun ready. Hu will take care of the rear. You stay close to Oregon. I'll take the lead . . ."

Tarrant's heart pounded with the beat of a trip hammer. His feet seemed to be made of lead. And their goal was at one and the same time only a few feet off and miles away. The unknown and what it held made the sweat break out on him. Then it was too late for thoughts. For Lansin's hand was against the bulkhead. It stayed there for an imperceptible second. Then his whole weight was thrown against it.

THE whole thing took only a few seconds. They were stepping on each other's heels, so quickly did they follow one another. Tarrant saw the whole action over Oregon's shoulder. There was but one man in the room into which they'd broken. He was dressed in a pair of dark coveralls and he was bent over a desk. Tarrant saw him throw a startled look over his shoulder at the sudden sound which came from behind him. Then Lansin was on him with upraised arm. The arm descended, there was a sharp crack as the pistol slammed against the other's skull. And the man slumped face down against the desk, blood pouring from a hole in his skull. Hu slammed the bulkhead closed at the same instant.

"Stay close to that door," Lansin said. "You and Tarrant help me drag this guy in the corner."

Tarrant was breathing heavily both from excitement and exertion when he let the dead man drop to the floor. He had always wondered how he would feel should the time ever come to him when he would be involved in murder. Now he realized that there was no feeling he could put his finger on and say that this was how it felt. The man was dead, with a huge hole knocked in his skull. And that was all there was to it. There were more important things to think about and do.

They had stumbled into the supercargo's office. It was a square box of a room. Besides the desk and numerous books, there was nothing more to hold the attention, a situation Lansin was

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deeply thankful for. He knew that it was highly improbable that anyone would come to this office since the ship had only been used to pick up Machin, Chen and the girl.

Tarrant noticed after a while that Lansin's face bore a thoughtful expression. They were sitting about on the floor, talking in whispers, planning their next moves.

"By all that's holy!" Lansin exclaimed after a while. "This is the most quiet ship I've ever been on. I can't hear even the smallest sound of engine."

"What's stranger," Hu said, "is that there is no feeling of movement. Unusual to say the least."

"I don't like it!" Oregon gave voice suddenly to their own feelings. "Something's wrong."

"Okay," Lansin said. "That's how I feel. But what are we supposed to do about it?"

"Get out of here," Oregon said.

"And go where?" Lansin asked.

"I don't know. But I just don't feel right in here. It's—we're prisoners in this place." He said the last as an afterthought of deep conviction.

"Funny," Lansin said. "But I have precisely the same feeling. Tarrant, try the door."

It was locked. Yet when they had rushed it, it had opened readily.

"I think," Lansin said slowly, "that we've stopped moving. Which means they'll be coming for us soon. Since they know of our presence on board they will reason we're armed. They may come in shooting, though I don't think so. On the other hand, they may throw the door open and invite us out, with our hands up. In that case I suggest we do as we're bid. Later there will be other opportunities for us to take the offensive. But our prime consideration is for the future. We *must* get to their stronghold . . ."

Nor had they long to wait. Suddenly the door was pushed open. Nothing was to be seen beyond it. But a voice called:

"Throw your arms out. And come out with your hands up."

THE corridor was lined with men to either side of the door, all armed, and all waiting for Lansin and the others to appear. The sailors were dressed alike in dark-colored coveralls. At their head was a tall, slim man in uniform that was conspicuous by the absence of stripes or braid. If it weren't for his cap and regular trousers he would have been just as easily taken for one of the crew. It was he who had called. He waited for the last of the four to appear, then commanded:

"Keep your hands up, gentlemen. All right, men, take them topside."

Tarrant turned eyes which were suddenly bitter to the bulk of the mountain which seemed to rise out of the very depths of the dark waters. They were anchored to a huge pier which extended for some distance out into the water. But because of the prevailing darkness they could see little else except their immediate surroundings.

All about them on land were the movements of people. On deck were only shapes of men. But there was no mistaking what it was that was held against their backs. Only cold steel muzzles could feel like that, they knew. Their eyes searched each other out and begged questions. But not a word was spoken by anyone. It was as if they were waiting for an order, a sound, a command.

Suddenly, from the land side, came a shout:

"Bring the prisoners along, Lieutenant."

No sooner had the four stepped on

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shore when a dozen flashlights made light their vicinity with pale glow. The lights shifted until the prisoners were bathed in their glare. Rope bonds were placed about their wrists and then they were shackled tandem-fashion.

Again the voice shouted:

"Done? Good. Bring them along, then."

THERE were three others present in the long room whose ceiling seemed to reach to the very stars so high was it. Only Tarrant had eyes for the girl. The others looked about them curiously.

It was a room to arouse curiosity and wonder too. It was immense, fully fifty feet across and perhaps forty at the width. Two of the walls were lined with books, a third wall was a window which overlooked the sea, and the fourth was a *map*. But such a map as they'd never seen. It reached almost to the ceiling, which was a good seventy feet from the floor. It was a map of the world, but a world which was a combination of the ancient and the modern.

Macedonia and Greece rubbed elbows, one as large as the other. The United States was called American Tartary. Russia was the Land of the Khan of Greater Russia. Siberia, of the Lesser Russia. Germany was called Teutonia. China bore its ancient name, Cathay. And Japan was part of it.

But though Tarrant had eyes only for Mona, Lansin, after a couple of quick glances at the room, gave his whole attention to the men. They were well worth the observing.

He skipped over Machin and Chen. He had seen them before. But the two others in the room were certainly worth a second glance. Also a third. One was tall, strongly built with a square full face which was adorned by a red beard. He as well as the other was wearing a robe which was white with blue borders on the hem. They wore the robe as though it were a toga. The second man had a Mongol cast to his features. A thin moustache drooped over thin wide lips. From their impatient looks they were waiting the arrival of someone.

FROM somewhere in the distance came the booming metallic sound of bronze being struck. The men turned as one, to the doorway. Lansin gasped, his eyes wide in unsuppressed amazement. There was a figure in the door. It was a man. In one hand he held a spear, in the other a vessel from the spout of which a tiny flame burned brightly. There were odd characters on the blade of the spear, writing which looked like Sanskrit. The same writing was repeated on the face of the lamp.

The tall figure approached the two men near the window with long slow steps. They stiffened as he drew close, then fell back before his advance until they were almost at the immense window. Machin and Chen also seemed fixed, as though this being's presence was the most dramatic thing in their lives.

"You have come from a long way," the figure announced casually, as he turned his full attention on Machin and Chen. "It is well. I have need of you here for the present."

"Mighty Keeper," Machin said in a low voice. "We have not come empty handed. For we have Gamen Lavy's daughter . . . and four others . . ."

"I was apprised of their coming," the man said. "And prepared for it. Go. Your places await you. You have served well. As for you, Khan and you, Barbarossa, the time is not yet. I know," stopped the red-bearded man from saying what he started to. "I said it would be soon. But not yet. Go, and

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leave me with these."

The instant the others left Tarrant moved closer to Mona, and she in turn leaned her weight tiredly against his tall strong figure. As for Lansin, Hu and Oregon, they stood in a close group, as though in common protection. The tall robed figure stood regarding them in silence for a few seconds, then leaned his spear against the window and placed the lamp on a three-cornered table nearby. There was an armless chair before the desk. He seated himself at it and nodded his head slowly up and down a few times.

"You have all come a long way. One for reasons of love, to use a word he knows well, the woman because I bade her come, the rest because you had mistaken ideas about undoing my work. . . . Be that as it may.

"Henceforth, for the duration of your stay, you will be my guests, willing or not. There is no escape, except by the means which brought you. I bring that up because there is in the minds of some of you an idea that you *will* escape . . ."

He smiled as the three men looked quickly at each other. "I know more than that," the robed figure said. "I knew the very hour your journey was conceived, as well as the instant you stepped aboard the vessel which carried you to the shores of my land . . ."

"I don't believe that," Lansin said. Though why he should have said that was a mystery to him.

"Then let me show you," the other said. "Look!" he gestured toward the window.

Mona gasped in sudden fear as the window clouded over through its enormous width. An opacity through which cloud figures floated, was to be seen. Gradually the milky-grey clouds became of an even texture. And the figures were to be clearly seen.

THE scene was a library. There were six people in the room. Five of them were grouped about the sixth who was bent over a book. The sixth man was Lansin. He turned to the man nearest his right shoulder and said, "Truth or fable, who is to know?" But the words were spoken aloud, as though the window had become a movie screen.

"How . . . I can't believe either my eyes or ears," Lansin said. And for once his poise was broken, his easy manner penetrated.

"Look again!" the robed one said.

Once more the screen ran milky-white, and once again became clear. This time the scene showed a wide stretch of water. A strange, cigar-shaped craft floated on the water. As though a camera was at work, they were brought closer to the craft. They saw the figures in the water suddenly. They were instantly identified as Lansin, Hu, Oregon and Tarrant.

"I believe you," Lansin said. "Though how you worked something like this out is beyond me. Perhaps one of our physicists can explain. Until then . . ."

The robed man turned his attention to Mona in an abrupt swing away from Tarrant.

"Your father, my dear, was a truly great man. He was also an extremely intelligent man. I hated to send him back to the place in Death's Orbit from which I'd called him. But he was a rebel born and would always remain that. It had to be done. I know that you will understand some day."

"And Bruce? What about him? Was he a rebel too?" Tarrant asked suddenly.

"No. He suffered from the same weaknesses he had suffered with hundreds of years ago. Why do you start? Didn't he tell you who he was? But I see he didn't. Perhaps it is time for ex-

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planations.

"Have any of you the smallest idea where you are?"

They looked to each other but in all their eyes was the same blank look.

"The Garden of Eden," the robed one said softly. "Yes. This immense rock is all that remains of it. Once there were flowers here, trees, birds, animals and human beings. Now it is a rock stuck out into the sea which was the *flood*. The waters receded, but when they did there was nothing which would grow here. Luckily, I was able to save at least a branch from the tree of knowledge. Thus was made possible the acquisition of the *Lamp*. The Lamp! Aah! If it were not for the Lamp.

"Aladdin and those before knew only how to summon the Djinn. The spear told me the real purpose of the Lamp and how to summon the *dead* . . ."

The same thought flashed through Mona's and Tarrant's mind. This man was crazy.

". . . No! I am *not* crazy," he said. "Nor are you. Listen and believe. There was Cain and Abel. But there was one other, the first, the one for whom my father and mother tasted of the fruit. I am he, the nameless one, the one whom the great Power created not of man or woman, yet the son of my father and mother. For first He had to see if they could care for me. In me was all the wisdom of the world, and all the glory and all the sorrow. In me was everything which was to be known, past, present and future. But I had no voice and they ate of the fruit. So they were banished.

"They were banished, and because of the edict, I was never forgiven but left to die in the Garden. They were wrong. I did not die. I lived. Then came the flood and I saved a branch of the tree, and from it made the spear. It told me of the Lamp. With the tree and the Lamp, there was none so wise. For never while I existed would the oil stop feeding the flame. So it must be, until the great One remembers. When that day comes He will summon me on high to sit on His right hand . . ."

"Holy whitefish bellies!" Tarrant breathed aloud. "This guy's really buggy!"

"Am I? Then let me tell you more. The two men who were here when you were brought in, do you know who they were?"

"SURE," Tarrant said with a broad grin. "One was Ghengis Khan and the other Frederick Barbarossa."

"Quite right. But it seems you have forgotten Lavy's story . . ."

Lansin knew what he meant. For in Lavy's story it was explicitly explained that the old ones, the ancient warmongers, still lived.

"This one knows, does he not?" the robed figure turned to Lansin. "And he finds me incredible, yet possibly true. Right, my friend?"

"Quite," Lansin said tersely. "But not understandable. If what you say is true, what is the reason for all this?"

"The world has need of me. In all the great lands of the world there is turmoil. I have decided that the time has come when the world needs to be ruled as it was in the old days, with the figures of old. I have brought them to life, though their bodies still lie in the Hall of the Chiefs. The spear brought them to life and they live by the flame of the Lamp. Peace is a word of no meaning. I can see what the end will be, a conflagration so large not a person but that will not suffer. Do you blame me for not wanting it?"

"No. But how can you stop it?"

"I have almost done so. Wherever possible I have set one of the great ones.

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Always in his homeland. Since I know of what is to be I can direct them in the proper direction. Who needs weapons when I control the arsenals of the world. Those pistols you brought with you, do you think they are something which has no equal?"

Somehow, Lansin felt the other was laughing at him. He let his mind go blank.

"Possibly not," Lansin said. "But they are something which no nation possesses. They are in the proper hands."

"Toys. *I* have the means for making war. And if I cannot have peace in my way then it will be war. Already the functions of some governments have been taken over by me . . ."

"We know," Lansin said unexpectedly. "In France and Spain and perhaps England and Russia. But in America you met failure. That's why Machin and Chen are here. For without Bruce and Lavy you lost."

The robed figure's face was not to be seen because of the cowl which was part of the robe. Suddenly the cowl was thrown aside and for the first time they saw the face of the man. It was a bitter face, sardonic-eyed, with long thin lips, curving eyebrows which seemed to disappear into the hair at the temples. He had a rather long nose, sharply aquiline with peculiarly wide nostrils. Those nostrils were dilated in anger now.

"I am Nemon," he said shrilly. "The Keeper of the Flame. I am he who was cast down. The world called me other names. But I am he who will command in the end. For so long as the spear is by my right hand and the Flame alive in the Lamp, none can oppose me. Look! Listen!"

Words poured from his lips, foreign words, words which had no meaning for those listening to them, names, phrases:

"Come forth," Nemon shouted. "Appear by my right hand and my left."

Mona moaned in horror, and Tarrant's hand tightened about her waist in reflex. But he also felt a thrill of fear deeper than any he had ever known.

There was no warning, no odor, no sound. One instant the room was empty but for the man at the desk and those facing him, the next, a dozen figures came alive to either side of him.

"Look!" Nemon said exultantly. "See! They are all here. Alaric! Tamerlane! Rolland! Peter! Charles of Sweden! Charlemagne! Look! Do you not recognize them?"

They breathed, they were alive, they moved. And yet, Tarrant could not tear his eyes from them, they were not alive. For they moved like automatons, stiffly, like robots.

"My puppets. I called them from the vale and they came. One by one they shall rule again. But if the world does not heed my call they will rule as they did in days gone by, with fire and sword. Only now it will be with more terrible weapons, swords that will bite deeper than the ones of old. Lavy and Bruce were fools. They tried to warn the people of my coming. Who would believe them?"

"Then why did you call them?" Lansin asked, though his lips were parched with fear.

"Because there is nothing human or otherwise that can cross my will," Nemon said. "Now or ever."

"Then all is pretense," Lansin said bitingly. "You are Satan. The Fallen One. The Bitter One. The Angel who is lost!"

NEMON smiled. He gestured with a hand and the phantoms he had called forth disappeared. He continued to smile.

"I have been called many things.

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Perhaps it is as you say! I am all those. But I am going to rule this planet . . . or wreck it! Wait!" Nemon halted Lansin's words before they could leave his lips. "I have the means to do it, so don't think I'm presuming. I would rather not. An empire composed of emptiness is the least satisfactory of realms. To calm your mind in this respect, however, I'm quite sure it won't be necessary."

"How very decent of you to say that. You will spare the world, won't you?"

Nemon's lips were still twisted in a smile. At these words, the smile was wiped clean. His voice held a peculiar flatness as he called:

"Guards!"

As though they had been in the air about them, so quickly did they appear. Twenty men dressed in tightly fitting tunics, as alike as peas in a pod, as to size and shape. Tall strapping men. But only Mona noticed a peculiarity common to all of them. There was that robot air which was noticeable to the great ones Nemon had summoned before.

"Take them away," Nemon said in a quiet voice. "Take them to the tower room. And lock that one up by himself and tell Horab to teach him how to keep his tongue from moving so."

It was a strange thing, Tarrant had thought at their capture, that they had not been either disarmed or even searched. Now he was thankful for it. Life seemed to be held cheaply in this place. And death could be sought after as a reward. So that when Lansin called:

"Get those guns out!" Tarrant was not the last to do so.

The guards seemed unaware of the guns. They started forward to do their master's bidding. Oregon was the first to fire. Using the pistol in the manner of a machine gun, he pressed the trigger and held the gun low against his hip.

There was an odd hissing sound as of escaping gas. A light appeared to stream from the muzzle of the pistol. The ray flashed from one to the other of the oncoming guards, struck and passed through them, to hit the walls and go right on past. But that was all there was to it. Oregon continued to fire until several of the guards reached him.

The others also fired the ray-guns. And at the end, just as two of the brawny guards reached him, Lansin took one shot at Nemon. But the smile continued on the lips, and the body continued in its upright seat.

Suddenly there was a wild scream of rage. One of the men took hold of Mona. It was then Tarrant lost his head and became a raging animal instead of a human being.

HIS hand flashed down on the guard's skull. He forgot the pistol was still gripped in his fingers. The butt made a sickening crunch as it struck. But the man only looked blankly at Tarrant and continued hauling Mona toward the door. Tarrant dropped the gun and leaped forward, his fingers ripping at the hands holding the girl. Those hands seemed made of steel wire. Though he tugged and tore with all his strength, Tarrant was not able to either tear the other's hands away or stop him from taking the girl. And at the end another guard took hold of Tarrant, and as though the tall writer was but a child, lifted him bodily and carried him out of the room. Nor was it long before the rest were treated in similar fashion.

The tower room was like a gigantic bird cage.

They felt like imprisoned birds also as the barred door closed on them. Only Lansin was not with them. They could see where he was taken to, however. It

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was to another room next to theirs. This one was square, though, and had a ceiling, whereas the one they were in was open to the sky. Bars separated the two cells.

Four of the guards were in the room with Lansin. While three of them held him fast the fourth reached up and pulled a couple of shackles which hung suspended from the ceiling, to where they could be attached to Lansin's wrists. Then the guard hauled down at a chain and Lansin's feet left the floor. From then on things moved quickly and horribly. Two of the guards lifted another pair of shackles from the floor and made Lansin's feet fast also. He looked like a side of beef strung up ready for the butcher. And to further the simile, what looked to be a butcher, appeared on the scene.

It was Horan.

He was a short man, squat, with enormous shoulders and hands. He had a large head shaggy with uncut hair. His eyes were set close to his nose and were red-rimmed and mean. His mouth hung slack and when he saw Lansin suspended and trussed up, his mouth widened in a grin that was like an idiot's for emptiness and a sliver of saliva dripped from one corner of his mouth.

He started to play with something at his waist. A thrill of horror went through those watching him from the other cage. For when he pulled it free they saw it was a long whip that was tied to the apron he was wearing. One of the guards turned to him and said something to him which made Horan grin widely. The great mane shook wildly as a silent paroxysm of laughter shook the body. But it was a silent laughter. The guards left and Horab was alone with the prisoner.

He uncurled the long whip and snapped it suddenly and the sharp sound startled the others in the next cage. They could see Lansin's face pale in the glow of the lamp which illuminated his prison cage.

"Oh! No! NO!" Mona moaned. "He can't! He . . ."

Tarrant suddenly clamped his fingers against her lips, preventing them from saying what they had intended. She was pressed close to him, her head against his chest so that she didn't see the first blow of the whip. But her ears heard the terrible sound it made as it struck, and heard the moan of pain which was wrenched from Lansin's lips.

TARRANT mouthed a whispered damnation and lifted Mona from her feet and carried her to one of the four bunks which lined two of the barred walls. He placed her on the bunk, face away from where the torture of Lansin was going on, and covered her with the blanket which was lying there. Then he said gently:

"Cover your ears, honey. And face away from, from . . ."

She moaned in terror as Lansin suddenly screamed in pain. She huddled deep into the blanket trying to shut out the sound of what was going on. But Tarrant and the others had to see, had to stand and watch.

Horab was enjoying his work. The whip sang its horrible song as it whistled through the air. And every time the lash struck a cry was wrenched from Lansin's lips. After a while the cry became a terrible sound that was more animal than human.

Long before that Tarrant and the other two were screaming invectives at the executioner, shaking the bars, trying to tear them from their foundation. At last blessed unconsciousness took hold of Lansin and his head sank to his chest.

"Aahgh," Horab grunted sourly. He

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was displeased that Lansin had not held out as long as he hoped he would. It was always so much better sport when a man was strong and able to take punishment.

He turned and snapped the whip at the bars toward the three watching. It curled toward them, as though it held a volition of its own, seeking another victim for itself. Hu fell back groaning in pain. The tip of the whip had struck him across the cheek.

"It—it's got a steel tip," Hu whispered to the others as they fell back. His cheek was dripping blood suddenly. They knew then why blood streamed from Lansin's body.

Horab grunted something and turned away from them on seeing they were out of range. He squatted on his haunches before the unconscious man and watched him steadily with unblinking eyes. At last a flicker of life stirred in Lansin's throat and the blood-scarred chest heaved in gasping breath. Horab nodded gravely on seeing life return to the other. Leaving his whip on the floor he stepped to a corner of the room and brought something back with him. At first the three horrified men couldn't quite make out what it was he was holding; it looked like a pair of fireplace tongs. It was a pair of tongs, but not for a fireplace.

The screams of Tarrant and the others were small cries to what came from their throats as they saw Horab's intention. For he had stepped up to Lansin and had reached in with the fingers of his left hand and pulled out the tip of Lansin's tongue. Then he clamped the tongs on it.

Mona, roused from her nest, turned in time to see Horab suddenly jerk at the tongs. She screamed, her eyes turning up in her head, and fainted before she saw what happened. It was only by the greatest effort of will that Tarrant did not follow her example. The sight was horrible beyond description. Horab had torn Lansin's tongue from his mouth!

The three fell back from the bars in horror. Lansin, aroused by the pain of the tongs clamped on his tongue, had given voice to a last great scream of pain, and once more lost consciousness. A great gush of blood poured from his mouth and dripped steadily to the floor.

This time Horab was through. Tossing the tongs aside, he stepped to the open door and closed it behind him. As he passed their cage he spat inside at them.

TARRANT stumbled to the bunk where Mona was still lying in a faint and sat wearily beside her, his head bowed in his hands. He could hear Hu and Oregon on another bunk talking in low sounds. But he didn't care what was happening. He knew only that before something like that was going to happen to Mona he would kill her first.

It was a good five minutes before she regained consciousness again. She looked up at Tarrant and her eyes were dull and lack-lustre.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

At the odd tone of her voice Tarrant shook her hard. There was the sort of apathy which bordered on insanity in her voice.

"Snap out of it!" he said sharply. "He's dead. And better off. How long do you think a man could take . . ." he stopped quickly when he realized that he was sounding hysterical himself. "Okay, honey! Let's forget it. Say! Wonder what the boys are cooking up? They're kind of quiet."

They walked over to the other bunk and looked down at the two men bent over something Oregon was holding.

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It looked like a midget radio.

"It is," Hu said grimly. "A sending set, to use your words. They didn't bother searching us. Of course they thought we only had weapons on us and they knew how little use they'd be. Let's hope it does what it showed it could do in the lab."

"And what's it supposed to do?" Tarrant asked. He kept one eye on the girl at his side. For the first time since their imprisonment she showed some signs of animation. He knew it was a struggle. But so long as she showed fight there was a great chance she would win through.

"This little baby's made to send messages for a distance of ten thousand miles. Someone's bound to pick it up. There's but a single transmitting beam for it. And security station will get it. There's one in Shanghai. . ."

"It's on," Hu said as a tiny light flashed green in the center of the little box.

Oregon glued his lips to it while Hu flicked the back of it open and fiddled with a couple of tiny dials. His slant eyes looked intently at Oregon waiting for the word that all was working. He smiled grimly as the other grinned widely and shook his head.

He spoke so low none of them could get a single word. When he lifted his head it was to say:

"We'll know by morning whether they heard us or not."

"What did you say?" Tarrant asked.

"Send fleet of *atom* planes," Oregon said quietly.

IT WAS strange, Tarrant thought, but it was exactly what he would have asked for. Yet the arrival of those planes meant death for all of them. What matter? Just that the monster below and the creations of his mind would die too. He though of the guards again.

"Wonder what those *things* are made of?" he asked.

"What things?" Hu said.

"The guards. Those guns had as much effect on them as if they were peas we were firing."

"I don't know," Hu said in bewilderment. "I'm sure I don't know. Those were atom pellets, bullets as large as a pinhead. But they packed the wallop of a ten-inch rifle shell."

"Then what good will atom bombs do?" Mona asked.

"Y'know," Oregon said introspectively, "I've been puzzling that deal over. The pellets went right *through* them. Assuming they were only figments of our imagination, and I've also got to admit if they were there are things I don't understand about that, the pellets also went through the walls. I saw them. Now how could they pass through something so materiel as a wall and not break down the molecular structure? The wall should have disintegrated. Or am I wrong?"

"No. You're quite right," Hu said. "I too was thinking about that. But because I haven't an explanation I didn't want to bring the subject up. Suppose we talk of it. I know I'm not sleepy, and I don't imagine the rest of you are. It *would* be a way of passing the time."

"It's all right with me," Mona said. She leaned back in Tarrant's arms. It was the first time she had sought his embrace. Sorrow flooded her being at the thought that they had so little time for love, and so much of it in them. She knew she was in love with him and felt he also loved her. She moved closer and felt his arms tighten around her and felt his lips brush her hair.

"Shoot," Tarrant said.

"Of course we don't know all of what's happened to bring on this ex-

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pedition. We were oriented but that was a quick job and rather sketchy at best. However, we gather that Miss Lavy's father died by some mysterious means that wasn't natural. And also this Bruce. There's this business of *tauatu*. which, unless I'm wrong, is telepathy developed to its finest stage.

"To add up the facts and fables I come to several conclusions. One, that Nemon is a supernatural being. I can't accept that. Two, that he has at his command forces which are much beyond any we possess and that they too are supernatural. I may swallow that though I can't say I like the taste. Yet I saw enough to more or less prove it. But if we prove one premise we prove the other . . ."

"Not necessarily," Oregon interjected. "Look! He spoke about the Garden of Eden. Suppose it was true? Suppose the Bible does speak the truth? Then there was a tree of knowledge. The fiction of Aladdin and the lamp could also be true. Many of those tales were born out of truth. They were just twisted through the centuries. In that case we have the supernatural."

"Then why," Tarrant objected, "wasn't there something said about the first born?"

Hu had an answer for that:

"Well. Nemon claimed he was made of the same stuff as his father and mother. Then we have to assume the power which made him change his mind later and decided to let the human race propagate itself. Which brings us to an interesting question. Is Nemon human or not? Remember. He was born of the stuff Adam and Eve were. Therefore he could lay claim to being an angel."

"Looks more devil than angel," Mona said.

"More truth than jest," Hu said, turning to the girl. "Who is to say that the old drawings of devils were not done from the reality of those times? We still copy those drawings when we want to depict the old boy with the tail. It could very well be that Nemon is mister Satan himself. Certainly he isn't acting out of character."

"You're joking now," Mona said.

"Not too much. Heaven and Hell aren't too far apart. It isn't too long a fall though certainly too high a leap."

"Well, let's get back to the guards and those characters he pulled out of the bag," Tarrant said. "Think they're real?"

"Can't say. Very often the eye sees only what someone else wants it to," Oregon said. "I've done very strange things in a laboratory, unbelievable things. So's Hu. Until we can experiment we, or at least, I, won't put myself on the stand."

"Yeah," Tarrant said. "I think I understand . . . Hey! What's going on here?"

The lights had suddenly gone out!

THEY peered toward each other and instinctively moved closer to each other. The men arose and stepped protectingly in front of the girl. They were quite determined to put down their lives before harm befell her.

The minutes dragged by sluggishly, like a snail crawling through molasses. The wait and tension became intolerable. Not a sound except the wild beating of their hearts. Tarrant could not hold out any longer. If nothing was wrong, well and good, if this was to be the end then he was going to find out.

"Hey! Hey, guard!" he shouted.

Only the silence answered and made a hollow mockery of his words. Once more he called, this time in a booming shout which echoed and re-echoed

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down the long hall:

"Guard. Hey, guard! What happened to the lights?"

"Save it," Hu said. "I don't think they understand English. Besides, if they're coming they will without our calling."

But Hu was wrong. They couldn't see the man of course, but they could hear someone fumbling at the door. Suddenly it swung inward and a low, heavy voice said:

"Quiet! Follow me, and hold one another's hand."

Mona recognised the voice instantly. It was Chen. She called to him in low tones, but he only said, "It's me. Now come along."

There was a dull light from a hanging lamp at the end of the long corridor which led to the circular stair by which they'd been brought to their eerie. They saw the figure at the same time. Mona gasped in horror. Someone had cut the guard's head from his shoulders. She gagged as she stepped directly into a pool of something sticky and which she knew instinctively was blood.

But Chen had no time to waste on a woman's hysterics. He turned a scowling face toward her and she recoiled from it, forgetting what she had just seen. Chen, having done what he wanted to, to make her forget the horror, continued down the stairs, the others treading almost on his heels. There were stronger lights on the stairway and they saw for the first time that Chen carried a curved sword, the blade of which was still dripping blood.

They forebore the questions which rose to their minds. They knew if there were answers they would come in due time. At the second landing from the top Chen paused and held a finger to his lips. They crowded close and he whispered:

"Danger from here on. And only I can handle it. Now whatever you do don't try to interfere. It won't do any good and it may do harm because you may get into my way. Now listen!

"This next landing has a short narrow corridor. There will be two guards, at one end and at the other. So far you've all been quiet. Now I want you all to remove your shoes just to insure absolute quiet."

They knelt and did as he ordered. When they rose again, he took the lead once again. They slid along the wall, shadows trying to be more than real shadows. Suddenly Chen's hand rose above his shoulders, bringing them to a halt. They saw why he had stopped them. Only a few feet below them but hidden by a turn in the stair, stood a man. They could see he was standing with his back toward them.

CHEN turned and did a most surprising thing. He favored them with a broad wink and whispered: "Just like in the movies." Then, he took the last steps three at a time and fell on the guard.

They saw his hand with the sword in it come up like a stroke in a tennis game and come down. And when it landed there was a sound like an axe makes as it hits a block of wood. This time Mona saw what happened. She kept thinking of what they'd done to Lansin. If it weren't for that she would have screamed.

But Chen was already moving forward again, his free hand beckoning them to follow. Tarrant swung Mona over the dead guard and carried her for a good ten feet before dropping her to the floor. The others were several feet in advance. But this time there was no surprise. Whether the other guard heard them or not was a moot question. He turned just as Chen took the last few feet

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which separated them in a single mad jump. Those few seconds enabled the guard to parry the first blow of the sword.

The clashing sound of steel echoed through the corridor. Chen dropped all caution. He had little time, he knew. The guard's mind was attuned to Nemon's. He had but to think once, and Chen's and the others' cause would be lost. So Chen wasted no time in fancy dueling.

Sheer savagery won the battle. They all saw the sudden look of fear in the guard's eyes, and in another second the eyes saw nothing. Chen started a swing which had it been completed would have cut the other all the way across the chest. But at the last instant Chen shifted the direction of the blow. It came from high and to one side and ripped through the whole side of the man's head and down past the neck. A fountain of blood spouted high in the air and the guard crumbled to the floor, his head almost severed from the body.

Chen was gasping when he turned from his fallen foe.

"I only—hope he didn't have time—to get through," he said between gasps. "Whew! I haven't done this in hundreds of years. I'm almost spent. But we're through. Now I can get to the real task."

They saw why there were guards stationed front and back when Chen ran to a pair of huge bronze doors almost in the middle of the corridor.

"The Hall of Chiefs," he said as he shoved the huge doors open.

They could only stare open-mouthed in sheer wonder at what they beheld. The hall itself was immense, as large at least as the room in which they'd had the audience with Nemon. But there were no windows here, nor book-lined walls. There were only twelve chairs, as tall as a giant's body. And in each chair a man sat. Chen stepped before the first of the immobile bodies.

"Look," he said pointing with the sword tip. "Napoleon, exactly as he looked when he was young. He still lives. But not for long . . ."

And before their bewildered eyes Chen reached in with his free hand and pulled the being from his throne. He propped the being up against the immense chair and stepped back a couple of paces. A laugh broke from Chen's lips.

"Die! Evil spirit brought from nothingness to this, die!"

THE sword cleaved right through the throat and the head rolled from the body. Once more there was the familiar fountain of blood. It poured over Chen and he seemed to revel in the feel of it. Then one by one he pulled the other beings from their thrones and chopped their heads from their bodies. All but one.

Chen looked up at the thing seated in the chair and they saw that the figure bore a remarkable resemblance to the human being in front of it.

"No. You I can't kill. Not yet. Perhaps later. But the rest I had to do away with. Tamerlane the terrible they called you. Well, the monster below forgot that not all spirits retain the souls they departed with. Mine was different. But I had to act and be as the others. Now where will the leaders be? Whom can you put in their stead?"

It was as if he was talking to the man below in the huge room with the maps of his dreams.

Chen turned and stared blankly at the others. Suddenly he shook his head as if he were clearing it of a dream, and said:

"I know you won't believe this, but only I could have killed these things.

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They were dead, yet they bled like you or I would have. And I am one of these. Yet not one. It was the single mistake Nemon made . . ."

"Yes. And your's too," a voice called from the doorway.

They turned and saw the cowled figure, still with spear in one hand and lamp in the other, standing at his side ten guards, with curved swords at the ready. "Kill that man," Nemon suddenly said.

"Wait!" Chen shouted loudly. "Look! I am Tamerlane, your leader, the man you followed half across the world. Do you follow this man's bidding?"

The four strangers looked from Chen to the group in the doorway and back to Chen. Suddenly Chen shouted:

"Take him. Quickly!"

But the guards were too late, because by the time their dim-working brains transmitted Chen's message to their muscles, Nemon had turned and made his escape.

"This way," Chen commanded, gesturing with his free hand for the guards to come to his side. They gathered about him. "How many more are there of you who were my followers?"

"Perhaps a hundred," one of them said.

"Do you know where they are?"

"Yes."

"Then get them here. But quickly!"

They scattered until only three of them stood by their chieftain's side. Tarrant, the girl, and the other two came over.

"Now we're in for it," Chen said. "I'm going to try to fight our way out of this. There is a boat, a small one, by the shore. Somehow we must escape and get to the mainland . . ."

"We'd better," Hu said. And told of the message they'd sent.

Chen whistled soundlessly at the news.

"So! Atom planes. Then surely we must get out of here. For Satan . . ."

"Satan?" Tarrant whispered.

"Of course! He as much as told you that earlier."

"Dale. Dale, I feel weak all of a sudden," Mona said.

TARRANT held her up while she struggled to regain her composure. At last she looked with beseeching eyes at Chen and said:

"My father. He was one of those you killed. And Bruce. I'm sure I saw him too. And Machin. . ."

"Yes, Miss Lavy. The dead-though-alive greats Satan had brought forth from where they were borne at their death. He has that power, though he cannot use it too often. But circumstances were right, and he had sworn that he would yet rule the Earth. He took that chance and it worked. That is why, though it might sound incredible, I was the only one who could kill these men, creatures of the undead. Yes, you saw your father though he wasn't dressed as when you saw him last. That is what he looked like when he was the great Indian chief . . ."

"Mighty one!" there was a roar of voices from the great bronze doors. They turned and saw a large body of the guards gathered on the threshold and beyond. Once more their voices shouted:

"Mighty one! Command us!"

Chen stepped forward, motioning with his head for his friends to follow.

"Protect these people with your very lives," he said in solemn tones. "Place them in a square so that no sword can reach them, so none can come close. Now . . . Onward!"

They got as far as the stair before the opposition showed up. It was then

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that Tarrant and the others noticed a peculiarity of the guards. They were dressed in the fashion of the chiefs whose bodyguards they had been. Tamerlane's men were outnumbered ten to one. But none were as savage as they. Slowly, by dint of sheer savage sword play, they hacked their way forward until they stood at last on the very last landing.

"Tamerlane!" Nemon's voice shouted from the long hall in front of the battling men. He stood alone by the doors leading to the room where first they had seen him.

"I hear, Satan," Chen shouted.

"It is of no use, this fighting. In the end I will win."

"Hah! But what is it that you will win? Nothing. I made sure of that. The chiefs you so carefully guarded are no more. I will die too. I know that. But one life was enough for me. Do your worst, Satan devil."

They saw a startling change come over the sardonic features of the man called Nemon and by Chen, Satan. Evil spread like pus over his face until it was diffused by a yellow glow. He thrust his cowl back until it hung about his shoulders. And from a scabbard hung about his waist he drew a long straight sword.

"I come," he shouted. "To make sure you don't live."

"Then come and greet me properly, with my sword in your throat," Chen shouted in reply.

As though Nemon's words were a signal, the fight was resumed with even more terrible vigor than before. Again the small body of Tamerlane's guards moved forward against the superior number of the enemy. But this time they moved slowly. And more slowly until they came to a halt. The dead and dying were piled in great heaps clogging the passage so that the men had to climb over the corpses and those still alive to fight the well and strong.

IT WAS Tarrant who noticed that the fight had raged past the room from which Nemon had stepped. A wild idea gripped him. Though it had been dark when they stepped into the room, he had seen the reflection of water. Calling to the others, he gripped Mona about the waist and lifted her to his shoulders.

"Chen!" he shouted, trying to make his voice heard above the din of clashing steel and the sound of men dying with screams on their lips. "Chen! In this room."

It was a miracle that he was heard. And more so that Chen was able to withdraw his men so quickly. It proved to be just what was needed to revive their flagging hopes. They moved so fast that they were able to close the great doors in the very noses of their enemies.

Of course they knew the relief was only temporary. But it would be long enough for the men to get a second wind and perhaps time enough to plan further strategy.

The huge room seemed to hold the silence of the tomb. Tarrant stepped to the wide window and flung it open. The sound of surf booming against the rocky headland came clearly to their ears. And they could see a rosy glow suffuse the cloud mass above. Dawn was poking its head above the mountains to the east. And with it would soon come the planes loaded with death and destruction. They did not have too much time.

"Chen," Tarrant called from the window. "Just where is this boat?"

Chen loped to the window and stood beside Tarrant. His chest was bare; he had not escaped unscathed from the conflagration of the battle. Blood

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criss-crossed dark streamers over the wide, smooth skin. A sword tip had ripped across one cheek and the resulting wound gave him a rakish cast. But despite the wounds he seemed not to feel tired or beaten out.

He pointed to a spot just to the right of the window.

"There. In that cove which looks like a pocket cut into the skirt of the sea. There's a boat with a motor lying at anchor. I had hoped we could reach it before we were discovered. Now . . ."

"We still can," Tarrant said decisively. "Tell some of your men to strip those maps up. We can tie them together, make a rope out of it. It's too far to drop from here; with the girl I'd be afraid to take a chance. But with the canvas it'd make the drop shorter."

"I think you're right," Chen said. He had been looking from Tarrant to his men holding the door, and from them to the map. "Here!" he shouted. "Some of you rip that map into long strips and tie them securely."

Oregon and Hu helped while several of the guards ripped strips from the wall map. It was the first time they were able to put themselves to some use. It did not take long. But time was running out again. There were a dozen men straining at the door, shoving hard against those trying to get in. It was an uneven battle and they knew it.

At last, after what seemed ages, Hu and his friend ran over with the makeshift ladder.

"We'll act as block and tackle," Chen said. His lips were a straight line across the lower edge of his face. He was beginning to show signs of strain.

"What about you?" Mona asked.

"Me? Satan will take care of me. He could have killed me long ago. Like he did your father and Bruce. But it's a much more painful death to die by the sword. He would rather see my belly ripped open and see me trying to hold my guts from falling out. That's why all this . . ." he pointed to his men still straining at the door. Suddenly it started to move inward. "Aah! The last page in *my* story," he said and his mouth split in a wide grin.

IF IT had not been obvious before it was now. Chen loved a good fight. Nor was he through having his say. He picked Mona bodily from the floor, brought her to the window sill and said:

"Last act. You first, Miss. And Tarrant. . ."

"Yes?"

"Give my best to Gaylord. He was the best boss I ever had."

Though death was approaching fast, Tarrant had to find this out:

"You mean you were one of the security patrol?"

"Not one. *The* one and the best one. I said before that though Satan brought me back from the dead I was not the same. I knew from the beginning what he intended. So I joined the forces of good. But enough of talk. We don't have too much time. Hu!"

"Present."

"I see you're a member of my tribe. They will understand you. A hundred miles straight east and you will find a settlement of tribesmen who will get you to the borders of China. Understand?"

Hu shook his head.

"Then off with you and luck . . ."

He turned from them and leaped to join his men who were already fighting again. And still he had time to tell four of them off to the task of acting as support for the improvised canvas ladder.

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One by one, with Mona taking the lead, they grabbed hold of the canvas and slid down into the gathering light. Tarrant was the last. Only he saw what happened. Satan himself, at the head of his men, charged into the room, breaking past the barrier of Chen's warriors through sheer numbers. It was he against the huge Mongol. There was a flash of brilliant sword play. And suddenly Chen staggered back, both hands clasped about his middle. Great gobs of blood seeped between his fingers. A mad grin was on his face. He fell backward to the floor and sat these looking up at Satan.

Tarrant heard his last words just as he slid down:

"Win—you win—but not the last round. Go-back-to-hell, you—de-vil . . ."

They were waiting impatiently for Tarrant at the boat. Hu sat at the motor and the instant Tarrant stepped aboard he flicked the switch. The boat shot out into the water with a roar which echoed and re-echoed among the cliffs which lined the shore. Their eyes turned back to the great rock that was called Basalt Mountain. Light flickered in the window they'd just quitted. They dimly saw shapes that were phantoms in the window. Then they were out of range and into the sea.

CHEN had made sure they had enough of water and food. For he knew how wide the sea was and that they might have to spend a full day on it, fast as the motor boat was.

The glow deepened until the whole sky was alight. The cloud masses moved heavily like the water's swell. The light came between the edges of the clouds. It was enough to see quite clearly by. Suddenly their ears heard a peculiar drone. The sound was unmistakable. Planes, large planes were approaching.

Hu bent over the motor and flicked the switch to full power. A savage light gleamed in his slant eyes. They had to make greater speed. A single bomb would do tremendous damage; a number of them might blow them clear out of the water. Hu listened to the sound of the motors. He gauged them to be at least at fifty thousand feet altitude. But *where* they were he couldn't say.

One thing he knew, though. They weren't too far off.

"Can't you speed the thing up?" Tarrant asked.

"Fast as I can make it go. Wish I could get more speed. Those babies up there are coming too fast. And some of those apples they're going to drop might land in the water," Hu said.

"Yep. And if they do, we might as well call it quits," Oregon said. "There'll be a tidal wave that'll wash us clear to New York."

The drone was louder, clearer and there were many of the planes, they knew.

The first bomb fell just as the mountain dipped from view. Immediately after the first came the rest, four separate and distinct explosions. A gigantic and frightening mushroom of smoke and flame shot up to and past the clouds. For an appreciable instant the clouds glowed with strange colors, orange, blue, purple, red, all mixed together. The sounds came to them later. Their ears were deafened by the sounds and the boat rocked in the waves which came up as if from nowhere.

Nor were their troubles at an end even then.

The sky suddenly began to rain rocks. One struck the edge of the boat nearest Mona and tore a whole section of the wood clear off. How they escaped without injury was something they couldn't understand. For the rocks

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continued to fall for several minutes. But all the time Hu was bent over the motor racing it to the highest, desperately trying to outrun the doom which was so hard on their heels.

When at last the waters stilled and the rain of rocks came to an end, it was an exhausted group of people who lay about. They were so fagged not a single one could do more than stir. It was Mona who put new life into their veins.

"Let's not just lay around. It's wonderful to have escaped from that terrible place. But let's think about getting back. We know that there are men in power who must be gotten rid of. It's going to be up to us to see to that."

"But didn't Chen say something about those things on the thrones dying and at the same time, holy whitefish bellies!" Tarrant finished in disgust. "I sound like a guy who's troubled with double-talk tongue. What I mean is, now that the mountain and Satan . . ."

"Do you believe that about Satan?" Oregon asked.

"I don't know," Tarrant said.

Nor did the others. For it was beyond their power of thought to believe, or their power of faith.

The discussion ended on that point. For an instant later Hu saw land . . .

THE man at the wide desk which was as neat as a child on its way to Sunday School, smiled gently at the four standing in a group about him. Directly in front of him stood Gaylord. A broad grin lighted the security man's face. He was more than proud. He was delighted that his men had proved themselves so well. He regretted the death of Lansin very much. But death was one of the risks his men took, and each of them regarded death as a sort of distant cousin with whom they had more than a nodding aquaintance.

"The nation," the President said, "owes you four a debt of gratitude which it may never be able to pay. For your deeds will never go down in history. Too much was involved. Too much was at stake. And too much would be treated with disbelief. But you can all go on knowing that because of what you've done, a whole world has been saved from destruction. I am sorry, deeply grieved at the loss of your comrade Edmond Lansin. He died a hero's death. And what is a greater pity was that though he did not die in vain, his death has meaning only to a few of us. But so it is for so many heroes. They die nor ask not why.

"Miss Lavy, may I give you my personal thanks . . .?"

One by one as he called their names, they stepped forward to shake the strong thin hand of the President of the United States. Gaylord was the last.

Again they were in the now-familiar office of Gaylord's. The handsome Gaylord found enough seats to go around. And after they were all seated, he said:

"So it ended at last. I hated to lose Lansin. He was the best man I ever had. But tell me. I'm still mystified by a great deal of what went on."

"We will," Tarrant said. "First, the people the Secretary of State mentioned when you brought me in to see him, what has been taking place in their countries?"

"That's why I want to hear more of what happened," Gaylord said. "You see, death struck them down. All of them. And all at one time. We got the reports. Every last man we had on the list died at exactly the same moment. But what is puzzling me, is what happened to them after their death. Only one report of what took place has come to me from England. The report says

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that the body of Charles Hemain fell into a heap of dust when they tried to put it into a coffin . . ."

The four sitting in the room looked at each other. Chen had spoken the truth. They *believed* now. But would Gaylord?

It was Tarrant who answered for all of them:

"What matter? They're dead. And their work can now be circumvented. Let's just call it quits . . ."

They walked the street, his arm about her waist. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"Well, I'll be . . . It all started here, remember?"

She looked up at the frowning granite face of the building and said:

"That's right, Dale. You were in *such* a hurry. You almost ran out of my life."

"*Out* of your life, honey? You mean *into* your life. You're going to have to step mighty fast to get out of it, sweetheart."

"Want to go back to the restaurant where it all started?" Tarrant asked.

"For food or excitement?"

"Neither. I wanted to do something while I was sitting across from you. I just thought maybe I could do it now . . ."

THEY seemed to be the only customers. There was one other, a man, seated at a small table not far from them. They ordered coffee. The waitress brought it to them. But before they could drink it there was an interruption.

"I beg your pardon," a voice said.

It was the man who had been sitting at the small table. Tarrant recognized him instantly now that he was near. It was the detective who had followed them that day.

"Remember me?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Well, I don't work for the agency any more so I thought I'd tell you why I was following you that day . . ."

"Well . . ." Tarrant hedged. He didn't give a hang one way or another. He wished the other would go away.

"You thought it was because of the young lady. It wasn't. I was following you because you owe the Mongam Company some money . . ."

"The car I bought," Tarrant said with a blank look.

"That's right. They wanted to see if you had an income."

"Well, thanks," Tarrant said.

She waited until the man was out of earshot.

"So," she said, "you were a dead beat, eh?"

"N-no. I just owed some money to these people . . ."

"Look, darling," Mona said, honey-sweet in her voice. "No husband of mine is going to be called a dead beat."

"Hus-husband?" Tarrant bleated.

"Well, it didn't look like you were ever going to ask me, so I decided one of us had to take the initiative . . ."

He did the only thing possible under the circumstances. And her lips answered the pressure of his with an ardor which more than equalled his.

THE END

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BONE CABIN QUARRY

By LESLIE PHELPS

BONE CABIN QUARRY is about twelve miles from Medicine Bow, Wyoming. This is in the deposits known as the Morrison formation, of Upper Jurassic age. There were found fragments of limb bones and vertebrae of the giant dinosaurs of that time. They covered the ground in such profusion that a sheep-herder used some of them to build the foundation of his hut. That is how they got the picturesque name of the quarry. The region, now over 6000 feet above sea-level, was once low-lying, and the sediments were the accumulations near an ancient shore line or the sloping bank of a muddy lagoon. This is where the dinosaurs must have lived, not far from the place where they lay buried. One does not often find a complete skeleton; the remains usually consist of articulated limbs or tails or possibly the neck bones which must have been held together by the strong ligaments and tendons after the partial dismemberment of the carcass. The fragile skulls are rarely found. In the neighboring Como Bluff, more complete skeletons have been found, for example the great Brontosaurus and the grotesque Stegosaurus now mounted in the Yale Museum. Bone Cabin Quarry, after several years of excavating, is by no means exhausted, but on account of the dip of the strata beneath the surface of the ground, it can no longer be excavated profitably except on a large and expensive scale. The American Museum has recovered from it 483 parts of animals weighing in all nearly 100,000 pounds. Among them were forty-four large amphibious dinosaurs, three armored dinosaurs, four unarmored bipedal ones, six large and four small carnivores, some crocodiles and turtles. This probably isn't half the number, and in time this area will yield perhaps a hundred dinosaurs.

* * *

SUN WORSHIP

By KAY BENNETT

THE Egyptians had a series of sun gods under the generic name of "Ré." Ré Hamarchis was their supreme godhead. The Egyptian religion was like a solar drama. According to their mythology, Ré appeared on the surface of the water, and overcoming the powers of darkness, brought order out of chaos and took over the government of the world. He reigned for a long time and then became old, and the gods became unruly. The great goddess, Isis who had a way with magic, took advantage of his old age and loss of strength to get from him his secret name, the source of his power. Ré finally gave up the government of the world and returned to rest in heaven on the back of the celestial cow. With the spread of the solar religion throughout Egypt, Ré became identified with a number of local deities who were phases of the same god. Horus of Edfu was the morning sun rising upon the horizon, or the sun of spring coming forth after a dismal winter. Atum of Heliopolis was the setting sun in the west. Osiris represented the same thing. In time nearly every divinity in the Egyptian sector came to be identified as Ré. This deity is usually pictured as a hawk-headed man holding the symbol of life in one hand, and in the other, the royal sceptre. Upon his head is the solar disk in the coil of a serpent.

In the book of the dead, Ré is conceived as sailing through the sky during the day, giving light to the world, and at night, passing through the lower world to come up again the following day. As he advances through the sky, his bright rays expel the fiends and evil spirits who might impede his progress. There is in Egyptian mythology the thrilling drama, suspense, and sense of contest between the force of Light and the force of Darkness. What the sun does during the dark hours was quite a mystery, but when the sun would arise in the morning there was much rejoicing because good had triumphed over evil.

In connection with their sun-worship, the Peruvians made a fire by friction and called it their sacred fire. This sacred flame was taken care of by a selected group of maidens who were known as "Maidens of the Sun." If the fire went out it was a sign that the sun god was angry and had to be soothed. So a feast was held and the Virgins of the Sun made special cakes and beverages which were served to rulers and nobility. The Virgins of the Sun lived in secluded convents and were taught how to live by old women who had lived in seclusion for most of their lives. No one could enter their convent except the Virgins, the Inca, and his queen. If one of the sacred maidens lost her virtue, she had to be buried alive, and the village from which she came was destroyed.

* * *

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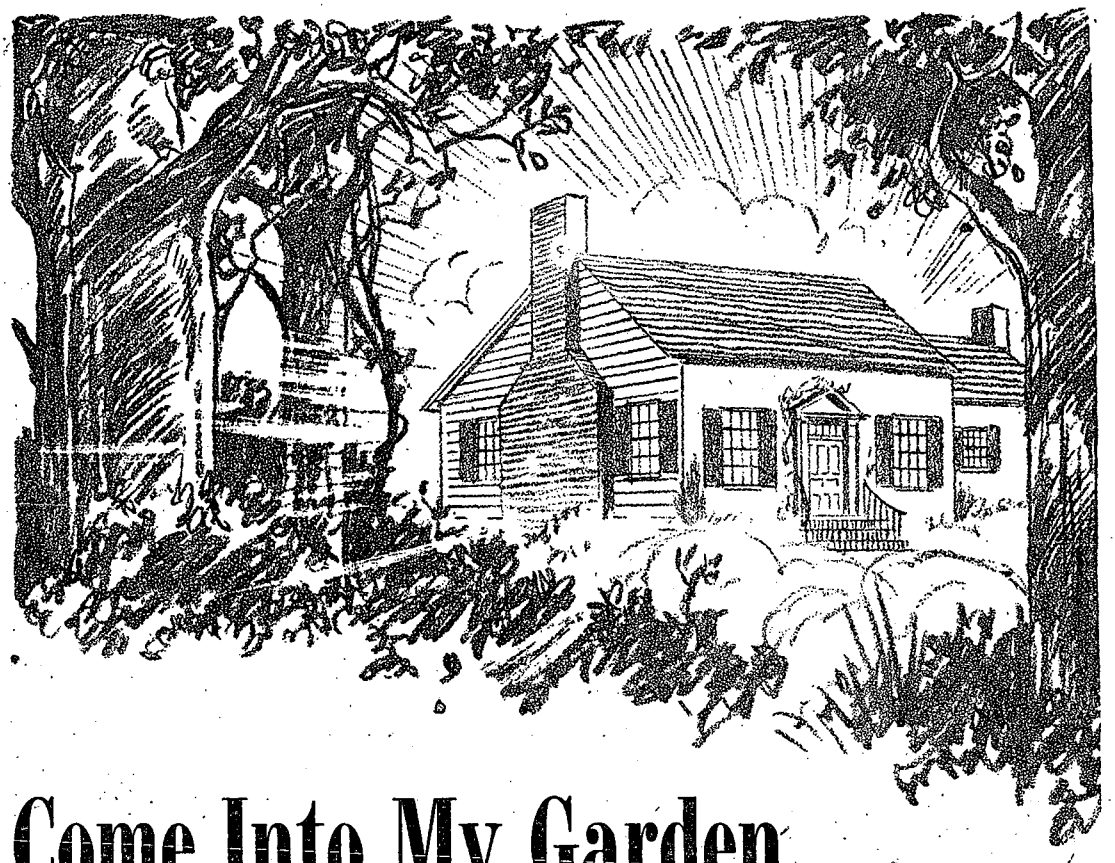

Come Into My Garden

by John and Dorothy de Courcy

The garden was only a product of Lorraine's imagination—they said. So she invited them to come and see it . . .

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence—; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Matt. 17:20

I HATE common sense! All my life it has debunked some of the best ideas I've ever had. Even when I was an adolescent, I furtively reread the fairy tales that had fascinated me as a boy. I clung to my belief in Santa Claus until I was fourteen years old. Yet, in spite of this, I make my living with the commonest of common sense. Occasionally, however, I rebel but the rebellion is usually short lived. I guess I haven't the courage of others for I soon come back to my narrow, logical little world.

Once, I almost didn't. Now as I look back on it, I'm almost sorry, yet I didn't

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We walked together, hand in hand, and a radiance seemed to flow around us . . .

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have enough courage. Maybe I would have been sorry the other way. It started, like most big things, in a very small way. It was nearly six years ago in July and I was indulging myself in a daydream, idly speculating on a thousand unimportant things when the phone rang. I sighed and picked up the receiver.

"Joseph Crane speaking," I said a little wearily.

"Hello, Joseph," the instrument replied. "This is Marcus Van der Meer."

"It's nice to hear from you Marc. How's your booby hatch?" I inquired.

"It's a private sanitarium and we're doing fine!" he replied emphatically.

"You know," I'm glad you called me up," I went on. "I was just looking out the window and thinking what a grand day for a game of golf this would be."

"I'm afraid we'll have to postpone the game of golf," Van der Meer answered. "I have a little problem on my hands that calls for the services of a high grade investigator."

"I don't think I'm going to like this, but tell me more."

Marcus cleared his throat noisily. "Ah—I'd rather not say too much over the phone. Would it be possible for you to come out here?"

"I suppose so," I assented, "if you promise not to keep me there."

Marcus didn't seem to find me funny so I didn't press the matter further. My housekeeper brought me my lunch just after the phone call so I paused long enough to eat. I wondered what the great psychiatrist wanted but I didn't let it upset my enthusiasm for my meal. I had seen Van der Meer more or less regularly since my return to town and he seemed to me the one person least likely to need my services. I knew that if any of his patients had escaped from his rather luxurious sanitarium, he would have done his own searching. I shrugged the matter off. I had known Van der Meer long enough to be sure that this wasn't a wild goose chase.

I CAN'T say that the balmy spring air and the twelve-mile drive to Van der Meer's place left me in an energetic mood. In fact, I was definitely sleepy. The broad, well kept grounds within the high wall of the sanitarium have an unworldly quality that time of year. All in all, by the time I reached Van der Meer's office, I felt well prepared to sit on a lawn chair and surrender myself to a very gentle Mother Nature.

Van der Meer's brisk greeting and enthusiastic manner aroused in me a sense of profound apathy. He devoted exactly one minute to the usual pleasantries and then his face became grave.

"Joseph, I'm in a jam."

I raised my eyebrows and said nothing.

"One of our patients has disappeared and so has one of our doctors."

"I have the case solved already," I said. "The patient turned homicidal, throttled the doctor and dragged his body down to that grove of trees at the south end of the grounds. After burying him, he leaped over the wall and made a dash for the border."

"Joseph, be serious!" Marcus snapped.

"O.K.," I sighed. "Tell me all of the gruesome details."

Marcus glared at me and pressed his fingertips together professionally. "To begin with, your statement could hardly be true. The patient was a twenty-two year old girl and the doctor was thirty and was an all-American a few years back."

"So much for personalities," I said. "Now what happened?"

"Frankly, I don't know!" Van der Meer said slowly. "I have very few facts. The patient is Miss Lorraine

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Roderick, daughter of the Connecticut Rodericks. She wasn't exactly insane. She merely had a fixation. The doctor is Anthony James. He wrote a very interesting paper on the treatment of her type of case, so on an impulse, I invited him to join my staff. I needed another man anyway. I turned her case entirely over to him and she seemed to be making satisfactory progress until day before yesterday. Then, without warning, they both disappeared. You can see how the newspapers would play this up so I can't call the police. We haven't examined his effects although we did glance through his room. All in all, I think we've disturbed very little which may be of some help to you. We've searched the building thoroughly from one end to the other and I personally went over the grounds without finding a trace. We've contacted all the hotels, taxis, and all the drivers of the bus that comes out this way have been interviewed. So far, we haven't found a thing! I'm afraid I can't even give you a lead."

I heaved a sigh. "We're really off to a good start! I hope you won't think me presumptuous if I press you for a few more details."

"Such as what?" Dr. Van der Meer asked.

"Oh, such as, what she looked like, what he looked like, what they were wearing, and so forth."

"I've written all that information down," he said, picking up a sheet of paper. "The patient, Miss Roderick, was blond, blue eyes, fair complexion, weight 115 lbs., height 5 ft. 6 in. When last seen she was wearing a white blouse, green slacks and white sandals. She wore no coat or jacket. The physician, Dr. James, hair light brown, eyes blue, complexion medium, weight 190 lbs., height 6 ft. 1 inch. When last seen was wearing light blue tweed suit, white shirt, brown tie, brown shoes, no hat."

I laughed shaking my head. "Marcus, you're terrific!"

He bridled slightly. "What's so amusing may I ask?"

"You've been reading too many 'wanted' circulars in the Post Office. 'When last seen was wearing'—tsk, tsk. Next week, East Lynn!"

"Joseph, I wish you'd stop this clowning! I realize I haven't any experience at this sort of thing. That's why I called you! Now if you don't want to do the work, just say so and I'll call someone else."

"I'm sorry, Marc," I smiled. "It's just that you seem to take this whole affair a little too seriously. I can't seem to work up any enthusiasm for melodrama on a sunny, summer day."

"Well, do you want the case or don't you?"

THAT'S where I made my big mistake. I nodded my head.

"Yes, I'll take the case, although starting with such a cold trail, I can't promise you results. But, I'll do my best."

I did do my best too. I spent three fruitless weeks exhausting every possibility. I questioned, rather I should say, grilled every person in the sanitarium including some of the patients. The result of all my work was very meager. At the end of three weeks I knew that Miss Roderick was under the impression that she had a blue rose garden. From her charts, I gathered that she had only to walk to some place where she was alone and there she would stop, close her eyes, and step forward. Her foot instead of stepping on the ground, would step on a bridge and she could then open her eyes and walk over the bridge into her blue rose garden. I'm no psychologist but this

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don't sound too unusual to me.

My information concerning Dr. James was even more meager. I knew only that he had had remarkable success in New York treating this particular type of case. He had written an article for the Journal which had been read by Van der Meer. His professional reputation was beyond reproach. There I reached a blank wall.

I went up to Dr. James' room and sat down at his desk to write my report, poor though it was. I started to pull myself toward the desk but instead, I pulled the top of the desk toward me. It wasn't exactly a secret compartment, but simply that one of the braces had broken allowing the top to move. However, between the top of the desk and the first drawer was a space and in this space was an ordinary looseleaf notebook. This proved to be the diary of Dr. Anthony James. To be sure, there were other bits of evidence and a few leads to be followed up but what little I found, corroborated rather than refuted the diary.

The investigation itself was long and tiresome but when it was finished, it made a very interesting story. Maybe my tastes are a bit odd for I find my childhood fairy tales interesting too. Dr. Van der Meer, however, never read that story. The reason you will find, is obvious. Most of the story is contained in Dr. Anthony James' diary which was written in shorthand. I have transcribed it and edited it a bit leaving out all the unimportant details but I have made no substantial changes. The first entry was made after Dr. James' arrival at the sanitarium in January. The last entry is on July 14, the day the two disappeared.

JANUARY 5.

I arrived this morning and I find the place even better than I had imagined. Dr. Van der Meer is a very understanding soul. What's better, he liked my article in the Journal and has a case that he wishes me to treat, using my personalized methods.

January 8.

This case should be a very interesting one. I am going to study the history for a few days and then I shall take over the treatment. It seems too bad that such an attractive girl should be in a condition like this, but if my treatment works as well as I hope it will, she will soon be able to go home to her family.

January 11.

Had my first interview with Miss Roderick today. I find several odd features. Her neurosis seems rather obscure as to its cause which will make treatment difficult. There seems to be no definite basis for her fixation. I gave her a word association test to which she reacted with startling normalcy. She seemed a bit distressed after the test so I asked her if something was troubling her.

"No," she replied, "well, that is—, yes. You think I'm insane like all the rest of them, don't you?"

"I frankly admit that my test doesn't show any abnormalities."

She was relieved at this so I took the opportunity to begin a friendly conversation. She was very pleasant and not nearly as difficult as her upbringing should have made her. I find none of the poor little rich girl attitude so common in some of the other patients here.

January 15.

Had an excellent weekend. I played golf with the two other staff doctors. Miss Roderick was very interested in my game and appears to be interested in sports. This is unusual but Miss Roderick is an unusual woman. I plan on using a friendly, personal approach to her problem which shouldn't be too

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difficult. She seems to be a very agreeable person. I managed to coax her into talking about this fixation of hers, the garden, and as soon as she found me genuinely interested, she showed no hesitation in talking about it. Since she is normal in all respects except her one strong delusion, she is allowed the freedom of the grounds. This is an excellent idea and will prevent her neurosis from taking any other form.

This afternoon when she returned to the main building, I asked her to tell me something about her rose garden. She looked at me hesitantly, then asked, "you won't laugh at me, will you? I mean, all the others seem to find my garden quite amusing."

"I won't laugh at you," I promised. "I'm not interested in proving that you are wrong. If it doesn't exist, I want to prove that to you."

"You mustn't do that!" she said quickly.

"Mustn't do what?" I asked.

"You mustn't show it to anyone else!"

"Why not? If it's such a beautiful garden, as you say it is, wouldn't you want other people to see it too?"

"Oh, no!" She shook her head vigorously. "It's MY garden! That's why I go there! To get away from people! It's so peaceful and quiet, no noise. Just the birds singing and the water gurgling in the brook. The ground is so soft and the roses smell so sweet, just acres and acres of them, as blue as the sky."

"Then this garden is large?" I asked.

She nodded her head. Her eyes were dreamy. "I've never seen it all," she went on. "I've only gone a little ways beyond the roses. The grass is blue too. At the edge of the rose field there's a little path which leads up to the cutest white cottage. There are blue roses growing around the cottage also."

I started a bit in my chair. "Does anyone live in the cottage?" I asked, trying to sound casual.

"Not yet," she said and began to cry. She wouldn't say any more about it so I let the subject drop. I tried to cheer her up before I left but I'm afraid I wasn't successful. This is a very puzzling turn of events. The details of the average fixation are usually not so clear.

JANUARY 18.

I instituted a new schedule today. As soon as Miss Roderick's breakfast is over, I have a lunch prepared for her and I send her off to her garden. She leaves the hospital and walks to the far end of the grounds to the small grove of trees and spends the day. I believe by stressing this fixation of hers for a few weeks, it will grow monotonous and she will seek other things to interest her. We will have a short chat at night and I shall endeavor to speak of little besides her garden.

January 20.

I followed Miss R. today to observe her actions. She entered the grove of trees carrying her lunch basket. I remained out of her sight and watched for about an hour. Throughout the entire hour she seemed perfectly normal, behaving as though she were merely killing time. She went into no state of detachment but rather engrossed herself in writing poetry in a small notebook. I had a chance to read the poetry after she had retired and it seems quite good although I'm no judge of poetry.

January 21.

I endeavored to stay out of Miss R.'s sight today and observe her actions. I watched her in the grove for an hour and twenty minutes during which time her actions were entirely normal. She wrote several letters all of which re-

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vealed a feeling of boredom. I hadn't expected my therapy to produce results so soon but it seems quite obvious she did not go to her so-called garden.

January 22.

I'm afraid I was a little over anxious. I entered Miss R.'s room tonight feeling exuberant. We chatted about current events and other general topics and then I brought up the subject of the garden. She seemed unwilling to talk.

"Don't you want to talk about your garden?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No. You don't believe me either! You're just like all the rest! You think I'm funny!"

"No I don't!" I contradicted. "I like you very much and I'll do anything in the world to help you."

"Then why don't you leave me alone?"

"I thought I had left you alone," I replied.

"No you haven't! You've been following me for the last three days."

I felt just a little guilty. "I'm sorry," I said. "It was for your own good that I did. You didn't go anywhere except to the grove of trees. You didn't go to the garden at all! Now tell me honestly. There isn't any garden, now is there?"

She began to cry again. "I thought at least *you* would understand! But you don't! I don't care what anyone says!! My garden is real and you can't help me by trying to prove that it isn't. I know I can't explain it but it's real just the same! And it's the only beautiful thing in the whole world and I'm not going to give it up. And I won't let you take it away from me! You're cruel and heartless just like all the rest of the people around here. I don't want to see you again but I don't suppose I can stop you from seeing me!"

I was very disappointed. "I'm sorry you feel this way," I said. "I've only been trying to help you."

"I know," she replied wearily, "but you can't help me by trying to show me that my garden isn't there. If you follow me I'll just wait until you go before I go to the garden!"

"Will you consider me your friend again if I promise not to follow you anymore?" I asked.

She nodded her head. We shook hands and I gave her a reassuring smile.

FEBRUARY 5.

This Roderick case has me upset more than I care to admit. After my ill-timed attempted cure on the 22nd, I've seen very little of Miss R. until this afternoon. She stayed in her room today so I went up to have a chat. She seemed strangely cool and distant. I don't quite know how to break through this reserve and re-establish a friendly relationship. If her behavior weren't so thoroughly normal in most respects, it might be easier.

February 21.

This is going from bad to worse! I'm even having trouble sleeping nights, it has affected me so strongly. Maybe I should be thankful. At least I have a chance to read and study. I tried a free association test on Miss R. and three word association tests today. Her behavior is very forced. I believe I shall have one of the nurses give her a test tomorrow and see if we can uncover this psychosis.

February 22.

Miss Kendrick gave a prepared word association test to Miss R. today and the results are most unsatisfying. The answers are obviously deliberate and reveal nothing. I believe I shall leave Miss R. alone for two or three weeks. Possibly if she had complete freedom for awhile, she would be less resistent to treatment. I think Miss Kendrick has some idea but what it is, I cannot

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guess. She hinted that maybe I was looking for a complicated cause when the answer might be simple. I hope she is right but I'm afraid it isn't as simple as Kendrick thinks. She refused to elaborate any so I'm left in the dark.

March 13.

Just returned from New York where I arranged for shipment of my personal effects. I'm afraid I'm in no condition to continue my work so I've put off seeing Miss R. Still having trouble sleeping. Didn't sleep at all on the train. Maybe it will be better now that I'm back. I am hopeful that Miss R. has improved in my absence. Her charts look encouraging. She has been going to her garden regularly but she has lost a little weight. I have ordered a larger lunch prepared for her.

MARCH 14.

I seem to be losing ground instead of gaining. R. seemed more reserved than usual although outwardly quite pleasant. When I mentioned the fact that I had been to New York, she seemed to know all about it. We started to chat about topics of general interest when for no reason she burst into tears. She became almost hysterical. I made the terrible blunder of losing my temper.

"For heaven's sake, stop that crying! You're behaving like a child! I'm not going to beat you. What do you think I am, an ogre?"

"No! You're just a fool! You come in here and yammer about stupid news items until I'm ready to scream! Why don't you leave me alone!"

"But I'm only trying to help you. I want to be your friend!"

"Friend, my foot!!" she snapped. "You're just number five in a string of psychiatrists and you all say the same idiotic things! You prattle along about nothing and keep swearing your undying friendship when you and I both know you don't care a thing about me! All you care about is the fortune my family is paying to keep me here and the huge fee you'll get if you can cure me."

"That isn't true and you know it. I like you very much personally and I'd still like you if you didn't have a dime! If you weren't so wrapped up in yourself you wouldn't be so hasty in your accusations. I'm not trying to force myself on you and if you don't want to see me, you don't have to. I won't be back from now on unless you send for me."

"Don't hold your breath while you wait!" she called as I went out the door.

I had Kendrick administer a sedative and waited for her to return. Kendrick was very reluctant to say anything about R. Seemed very angry with me. I asked her if she thought I should withdraw from the case. She told me not to be a bigger fool than I already was. Then she left before I could question her further. I guess Kendrick is right. I should have never tried to be a psychiatrist. My other cases are progressing but they are comparatively simple. I suppose there's no point in going to bed tonight so I shall do some more reading. Dr. Van der Meer remarked that I wasn't looking well. I know I'm not. I've got to get the R. case off my mind or I'll be a patient here myself.

I suggested today to Dr. Van der Meer that I withdraw from the R. case. Van der Meer would have none of it. It seems the others have been unable to effect any change in her at all. He seems to be under the impression that I am creating an emotional shock. I didn't clear up his misapprehension. Perhaps I should have though. He said

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that although my treatment was unorthodox, I seemed to be getting results. Warned me against working too hard, however. I wish I'd had the courage to tell him that the whole affair was just about out of my hands.

March 17.

Tried to get away from it all today. Had another game of golf. Half a game, I should say. Went around nine holes in 136. I did better than that when I was learning the game! I've got to stop worrying. If I don't, I'll crack up under this soon. I can't understand what is wrong and I'm afraid to talk it over with anyone else. I've been biting people's heads off for the past two days. I've got to work on my self control.

March 22.

I did a very foolish thing. I sent a note to R. asking if I might see her. She hasn't replied so I take it she means no. I'm very worried about her. She hasn't been out for several days. She's still losing weight slowly. I've got to do something soon—but what?

MARCH 24.

I went up to R.'s room today but found her gone. I stood there for awhile trying to think of what to do. While I was there, Kendrick came in to straighten up the room. As she was fluffing up the pillows a piece of paper dropped to the floor. I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket. After Kendrick left, I examined it. It was the note I had sent, thumbmarked and crumpled. I debated for a few minutes and then slipped it back under R.'s pillows. I stayed in my room the rest of the day, telling myself what an idiot I am. Kendrick is right. The answer is simple, horribly simple! What a master psychologist I am! I don't think I shall be able to sleep tonight but for an entirely different reason. I'm going to try to work up my courage to talk to R. tomorrow. There's no point in trying to read for I find I've read the Journal from cover to cover upside down. I'll try not to behave like a school boy. At least not tomorrow.

March 25.

I don't exactly know what my feelings are tonight. I'm very tired. This morning I went up to Lorraine's room. Her attitude toward me was rigid. She did consent to let me carry her picnic basket after I promised to return to the sanitarium as soon as we reached the grove of trees. We walked in rather stony silence and reached the grove before I had a chance to say anything. I stopped, deciding to take the bull by the horns.

"Can you forgive me for the way I've treated you? I haven't meant to hurt you. It's just that I've been so worried about you!"

"You've shown your concern!" she answered caustically.

I didn't answer. I couldn't.

"I'm sorry," she added gently. "I shouldn't have said that. It was unkind. You really do want to help me, don't you."

"More than anything else in the world," I said in a strange voice.

She looked away suddenly and I remained stupidly silent studying the lunch basket intently.

"Lorraine," I said at last. She didn't say anything. "Lorraine," I began again. She turned and looked at me. "I'm not a psychiatrist anymore," I said pathetically. "I— I—."

"You mean you've quit! You're leaving!" she asked dumbfounded.

"No, that's not what I mean. I mean, can't you forget that I'm a psychiatrist?"

"You won't let me forget it!"

"I know and I'm sorry. I've made a mistake, a big mistake. It's just that

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I want so badly to have you well. I—I'd do almost anything! Don't you understand that you're not just another case to me. I've lost sleep worrying about you night after night. Lorraine, how can I make you see that I love you!" I stood waiting for her to say something then went on. "I shouldn't have said that. I know you won't believe me but please don't laugh. I'll leave now."

"Don't go," she cried. She looked into my eyes. "Do you really mean it?" she asked in a low voice. "It's not just another trick?"

"I mean it with all my heart," I said earnestly.

Her eyes widened and filled with tears. Then I held her in my arms.

Lorraine heaved a long sigh. "Darling, I think I would have died if you hadn't loved me." Her voice was muffled by my coat.

Several minutes later I came to the realization that I was standing in the lunch basket. I stepped back and picked up the sorry looking mess. We laughed hysterically. We were still laughing when we reached the sanitarium. We sat down on the lawn chairs and talked for quite a while. Kendrick came out bearing a tray, smiling broadly.

"I thought you two would like a bite of lunch," she explained.

"You've been spying!" I accused sternly.

She shook her head. "Nope. It was woman's intuition."

Lorraine and I discussed many little things for about two hours and then I had a sudden thought.

"Darling," I said, "we can't be married until you leave the sanitarium."

Her face darkened. "I wish you hadn't said that. Until now I'd completely forgotten that I'm a lunatic."

I protested that she wasn't and tried to reassure her but somehow the day was spoiled. She went to her room soon after and I went back to my work, trying not to think. I wish there was someone I could talk to but there isn't. Maybe it will all seem different in the morning. At least, I know I can sleep tonight.

APRIL 1.

Today is All Fool's Day and I guess that means me. Lorraine left me crying. We had another talk about her garden. She steadfastly refuses to admit that it doesn't exist. She says she wouldn't feel right lying to me. I guess she's right. I wouldn't want my marriage founded on a lie.

April 10.

This whole affair looks hopeless. We talked again today about the same thing and I have to admit Lorraine is right. I wouldn't want to start our marriage off with a lie but she seems so unshakable and I can't think of anything I haven't tried.

April 24.

Lorraine and I quarreled again today. The future seems so black, yet there must be a way! There must be!

May 2.

I made an ultimatum that Lorraine either give up the blue rose garden or me . . . I'll apologize in the morning. She knows that I don't mean it. It's just that it's hard to bear, being so close to happiness, yet so far away.

May 3.

I had a great idea this morning. Maybe it's the way out of our difficulties. I hope and pray that it is. Lorraine is enthusiastic too. There is a state in the west where we can be married in spite of the fact that she is legally insane. I could continue to treat her as well or better as her husband. If we can obtain her father's consent, we could go there and be married.

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Lorraine has written a long letter, explaining everything to her father. She believes he will give his consent. I'm almost afraid to hope. All I can do is wait for his reply.

May 14.

Lorraine's father has sent a reply to me. He has asked that I come to the Roderick home to talk over the situation with him. Dr. Van der Meer is delighted that I am going to see Mr. Roderick and still seems convinced that Lorraine is on the road to recovery. It seems impossible that Van der Meer could fail to grasp the situation yet I'm afraid to talk it over with him. Maybe after I come back, I can explain it all to him. I plan to leave tomorrow.

May 28.

I seem to be beating my head against a stone wall. I should have known what to expect though. I simply allowed wishful thinking to get the better of me. Roderick was very nice and all that and probably understands better than I do. He has suggested that I say nothing to Van der Meer and he will do likewise. It wasn't until the evening before I left his home that Mr. Roderick would discuss Lorraine. I'm afraid as a psychiatrist I'm strictly second rate. He didn't refuse his consent to our marriage.

"Quite the contrary," he said. "I think you're a fine man and I'm convinced that you're very much in love with my daughter but I'm afraid it would be unwise to allow you to marry her under the present circumstances."

"But why, sir?" I asked. "I've already explained the problem from a professional point of view and I'm sure that I would be more successful in treating her."

Roderick shook his head. "I don't want you to misunderstand me, Dr. James. As a psychiatrist, I respect your opinion more than I would anyone else's. From the tone of Lorraine's letter I can see that she is tremendously improved yet I cannot help but feel that your judgment may be colored by your feelings. Before I can give my consent to your marriage to Lorraine, I must be assured that she is entirely over her condition. Yet if I were you, I shouldn't feel too discouraged since it is not only my opinion but also Dr. Van der Meer's that she will soon be ready to resume a normal life. All I'm going to ask from you is your assurance that she is cured and on that day, no matter whose opinion differs with yours, you will have my consent. When she's cured, you won't need it anyway."

"I see," I muttered dejectedly.

"Come on now, buck up," he said. "I know I'm doing the right thing for both you and Lorraine. And some day you're going to thank me for it. You just wait and see!"

I'm not entirely sure that I will ever agree with that last statement. I haven't said anything to Lorraine, but I must tomorrow.

MAY 29.

It breaks me up to see Lorraine cry. I thought her heart would break today. I did my best to cheer her up but I feel that our last hope is gone. Why can't she give up this silly delusion! Still, I shouldn't say that. It's my job to help her, not to abuse her.

June 4.

I began the old free association tests again today. I'm afraid I've lost hope. Today's tests were just as futile as I had expected.

June 8.

I cannot but feel that I am only prolonging the inevitable. Lorraine and I have had several talks about the garden. She has offered to show it to me but I couldn't bear that. Seeing her in a daze and knowing that it was be-

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yond my power to do anything about, would be just too much. I'm keeping up a front for Lorraine's benefit though.
June 15.

It's uncanny the way Lorraine steadfastly maintains her belief in the blue rose garden. She still seems disappointed in me because I refuse to go with her. I'm actually afraid to go. It would only strengthen her belief in the garden since undoubtedly she would visualize my presence there with her. Somehow I must convince her it doesn't exist!
June 27.

I'm at my wit's end! I almost half believe that the garden is there. I have to fight to keep from going with her each morning. I realize she is deliberately wearing my resistance down. What will happen on the morning I go, I'm afraid to think. She drew a sketch of the garden and the outlying territory, showing me exactly where she went today. Beneath her smile I can see that it hurts her terribly that I won't believe her and will not go there to be convinced.

"Why won't you go with me, Tony?" she asked.

I turned my face away. "I had too much to do today, dear. Maybe tomorrow."

She bit her lip. "Tony, you've got to believe me!" I looked away again. "If you'd go with me, there wouldn't be any problem!" she continued. "That little cottage is just there for you and me. We wouldn't ever have to worry again!"

I stood up suddenly. "I—I've got some important things to do, darling. I'll be back up to see you before you go to bed."

As I left, I could see she was holding back the tears with difficulty. How can she hope to convince me that her dream world is real!

JULY 4.

Lorraine and I watched the fireworks. The sanitarium, situated as it is on a hill, provides a very nice view. As usual, Lorraine added to her map of the garden.

"Today, I went straight to the cottage, our cottage, darling. It makes me so sad to be there alone."

"Lorraine, please!"

She smiled half heartedly. "Poor Tony. You're so obstinate! So sure of yourself. Why don't you come with me tomorrow? You just have to walk with me and hold my hand. When we reach the grove, we'll close our eyes, step forward and we'll be on the bridge. It's such a nice little bridge and when you look back, you won't even be able to see this ugly world."

I sighed. She could see that this was hurting me but she paid no attention.

"Tony, don't you see that you've got to come with me! It's the only way that I can prove that it's real! You're being unfair to me and yourself!"

I was shaken, horribly shaken. I almost asked her to take me there but I restrained myself at the last minute. My resistance is giving way. I'm worried about Lorraine for she's showing the strain too.
July 12.

After seeing Lorraine this morning, I drove into town and bought five books on horticulture and rose gardening. Tonight I'm going to carefully mark them and tomorrow we will read them together. Maybe if I can shake her faith by proving that there are no blue roses, the shock may do the rest. I can only hope! And pray!
July 13.

I don't understand women at all! I spent most of the morning proving conclusively to Lorraine that there are no blue roses. Finally, Lorraine broke into tears. I thought the problem was solved

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for she suddenly straightened up smiling, really happy for the first time since the day I first told her I loved her. She refuses to say anything about the garden. She merely smiles and changes the subject. I'm almost afraid to hope. Something has happened I know. Oh, dear God, please let her be cured! The only clue I have are the words she said when she left for her room.

"Don't you worry about a thing, darling. Our troubles are all over. I just know they are!"

She has definitely made a change for the better but to say that I am puzzled is putting it mildly. I guess I can only wait and pray.

July 14.

How utterly simple—the way she proved it to me! Why couldn't we have thought of this before! Lorraine is waiting for me now. We're going together to see the blue rose garden and the little cottage. If it's as beautiful as Lorraine says, we may not come back. What a fool I've been!

* * *

That's the last entry in the diary. It was hastily scrawled.

My official report was this: that Dr. James and Miss Roderick had made their escape over the wall and I advised that the case be turned over to the authorities.

Yet, this was a lie! For I checked every inch of that wall carefully and I will stake my reputation that no one can scale it. I also found their footprints in the soft earth in the grove of trees but the footprints ended abruptly sixty feet from the wall. I said nothing about that either. You see, I couldn't tell the truth and I know it WAS the truth, for pressed between the last two pages of the diary was a blue rose.

THE END

THE DRUIDS

★ By JON BARRY ★

THE institution of Druidism that held forth in ancient Gaul, Britain and Ireland before the Roman invasion, and whose influence continued for many centuries afterward, used magic in their work very extensively. The Druids were a fraternity of priests, teachers, physicians, and judges, who ruled over the Celtic inhabitants of the areas just mentioned. According to Caesar, the Druids attended to the functions of divine worship, performed public and private sacrifices, had jurisdiction over practically all matters of crime and public offenses, and nearly all quarrels were brought to them for settlement. Being quite smart, so they thought, with the art of magic, they were versed in the mysterious powers of animals and plants, the stock in trade of physicians during that period.

The oak tree was considered especially sacred to the Druids, and they tried whenever possible to perform their rites in oak groves. Oak trees that had mistletoe growing on them were held in special reverence because the Druids believed that the mistletoe had fallen from heaven, and that the tree on which it fell had been chosen by the god himself.

The females among the cult were called Druides, and they also claimed to have supernatural power and knowledge. They studied astronomy to further their interest in astrology, and they closely observed the heavenly bodies and maintained that they could predict events to come that were unknown to ordinary mortals.

The Arch-Druid wore a gold chain around his neck, from which was suspended a gold plate engraved with the inscription, "The gods require sacrifice," and on the front of their caps was a golden representation of the sun, and a silver symbol of the moon.

The Druids observed four important feasts each year. Dancing around the Maypole is believed to have come down from their May feast, which included the custom of dancing on the green to the song of the cuckoo.

Initiation into their mysteries was a dreadful ordeal. Only those with the strongest nerve could possibly pass the test. The ceremonies took place at night. Everyone admitted to the society bound himself by a solemn oath not to commit to writing or divulge the secrets revealed to him.

There were special parts of the country known

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as goodman's land, and if anyone would dare to cultivate these parts they would be struck with calamities. These places, according to the cult, were frequented by fairies and other supernatural beings. Music was often heard and some people claimed that they saw dancing at these places.

There were also the sacred cairns, which were stones thrown together by all who passed, each one adding a stone to the ever increasing pile. If anyone would disturb these cairns, superstitious people predicted evil to the despoiler. Druidical superstitions were so deeply imbued in the minds of the Scottish peasantry that the church authorities of Scotland had to take repressive action to counteract these influences.

* * *

PLANTING NAILS

By JUNE LURIE

BEFORE the arrival of the Europeans in the South Sea Islands, the inhabitants, or Polynesians, as they were called, were not acquainted with metal. All their weapons and implements were made of stone, or even of hard wood. Though only savages, they ornamented their war clubs, canoes, household utensils, and the outside of their houses with beautiful carving, all of which was done with tools made of jade or sharks' teeth, and must have cost them a lot of work.

When Captain Cook visited Tahiti and other islands in the South Seas he found that the natives would give anything for nails or pieces of old iron. So when he set out on his second voyage in 1772 to go around the world, he took with him, besides other articles, a quantity of spikes to exchange with the natives for provisions. A spike nail of any size was the most highly prized present he could make to a chief; and as he cruised around the islands his supply of nails ran short and he set his smiths to work to make more.

As the natives knew nothing of metal, they at first imagined that iron must be some kind of very hard wood and as the nails resembled the seeds of some of their fruit trees, they thought that these nails brought by the wonderful white people were the seeds of the iron tree which grew in their far off country. So they carefully planted some in their gardens; but after waiting for the nails to sprout, they were disappointed to find that it was still only a nail, and that there was no hope of it ever growing into a metal tree. However, they soon discovered that they could kill each other more easily with iron than with flint or stone, so instead of planting them, they turned their nails into weapons of destruction.

* * *

THE MYSTERY OF ANGHOR

By J. R. MARKS

IT HAS been nearly eighty years since Mouhot, the French naturalist, looked up at the magnificent heights of Anghor and brought back to the world the amazing puzzle of the Khmer civilization. Even today with its principal remains classified and its inscriptions translated and its monuments lifted out of the jungle, Anghor is still the silent mystery that it was in the beginning. The world knows more about it now that roads have been cut through the jungle. Every year hundreds of visitors from all over the world come to this odd corner and take away with them amazing reports that will incite the imagination of hundreds more.

If it were not for the fact that these tremendous monuments remain practically intact, defying time and weather on the edge of the Tonle Sap, the unbelievable tale of the civilization that built them and then vanished would rank as a myth. But the monuments are there: Anghor Thom, a walled city within whose metropolitan area at one time must have lived a million people: and Anghor Vat, the most supreme architectural effort of this strange culture and the grandest temple of the group was probably the most stupendous undertaking attempted by man since the corner stone was laid for the Tower of Babel. Near Anghor Thom are the remains of earlier erections and farther into the jungle are capital cities built and then abandoned, a trait characteristic of the Oriental monarchs. Traces of this lost civilization have been found wherever a tributary of the Mekong branches out. There is evidence that the temple builders were a part of a civilization whose population must have reached thirty million. There at Anghor was the finest metropolis in Asia, a town whose barbaric splendor is carved permanently into the temple walls, tower and terrace. This race of conquerors must have been as rich as Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, and yet for some reason the populace walked out of it and never came back. The jungle moved in and took over.

* * *

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TIME OUT OF MIND

by CHESTER S. GEIER

If time is simply a myth can a man shut it from his mind and remain young? Dick Brandon thought it was possible . . .

I'M an old man now, and in this, the evening of my years, I live among the memories of a long and busy life. Most of my memories are happy ones, and there are, of course, many filled with regret or sadness; but one in particular will always stand out with vivid prominence in my mind.

In such few years as are left to me, I shall think of Richard Brandon again and again, and I shall recall the strange role he chose to play in his small corner of the vast stage of life. And thinking of him, I shall recall, too, the bizarre fate which befell him as a consequence.

If you will bear with a garrulous and rambling oldster, I should like to tell you the story of Richard Brandon, the man who sought escape from the ravaging hand of time.

It was back in 1891, while a freshman at Harvard, that I began my friendship with Richard Brandon. I'd been acquainted with him before that, for we were both from the same town, Vanceton, in southern Illinois. But he was the son of Mortimer Brandon, the wealthiest man in Vanceton, and I was just the son of Norman Hartley, the lawyer on Queen Street. Our respective paths had crossed but seldom, yet sufficiently that we knew and recognized each other that first week at the university.

The fact that we were both from Vanceton formed a sort of kinship between us that took little or no cognizance of our difference in social status. This was aided further by my dislike for the snobbish young men who seemed to be in the majority of those with whom I came in contact, and also by a disinterest on Dick Brandon's part for the society of his kind.

"I don't like the way they waste time," he told me. "Do you know, Bob, most of them are here, not for an education, but because they have nothing else to do, or because it's something required of them."

"Do you consider that a waste of time?" I asked.

"Of course it is, Bob. Education won't be of any direct benefit, for they already have enough money."

"Perhaps they wish to make more."

"But isn't that a waste of time in itself? They already have enough money to provide leisure, and no matter how much more they obtain, leisure is not increased."

Time as a subject seemed to be an obsession with Dick Brandon, for in his conversations with me, he mentioned it again and again.

"Time . . ." he said, once, musingly. "It's a fascinating word, Bob. Just think of all the possibilities it opens up."

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The entire world seemed to have gone suddenly mad as everything whirled around him . . .

"Like travel in time?" I asked.

Brandon shook his black, crisp-curling mane. "No, not that. But suppose there were some way to halt time, suspend its passing, so that the rest of the world moved on while you yourself remained changeless."

"That would require the powers of a god," I said. "We're just mortal men. Each of us is allowed just so many years in this scheme of things, and no more."

"But suppose there were a way," Brandon insisted, his gray eyes intense. "Suppose there were, Bob."

I could only shrug.

I FELL into the tempo of university life easily, for I had a sincere interest in my studies. The busy weeks passed quickly. I was not too busy, however, to notice in Brandon a growing evidence of unrest.

"What's wrong, Dick?" I asked him. "Aren't you getting along with your work?"

"It isn't that," he responded. "I'm getting along well enough. But, Bob, nobody knows anything about time. Nowhere can I find a clear answer to my questions. Such books dealing with the subject as I've been able to find are vague and uncertain."

"That's natural enough," I said. "Time is intangible. We sense it, but that is all. We can't pick it up and examine it, and since we are unable to do so, how can we explain it?"

"But there must be an explanation, Bob! Each day we see further evidence of the passing of time. It's all around us. We can't avoid it. With all this evidence, there must be an answer." Brandon's face took on something of grimness. "And I'll find it!"

"See here, why all this concern over time?" I demanded. "Don't tell me you're trying to find a way to live forever."

Brandon bent his raven head in a slow nod, his gray eyes very clear and steady upon mine. "I am, Bob," he said.

I saw little of Brandon after that, for I became immersed in my study of law, and he himself seemed to be absorbed in subjects which in no way touched upon mine. I saw him frequently enough, however, to know that he was still as much interested in the subject of time as always, and still in stubborn pursuit of his quest of immortality.

After graduation I lost touch with Brandon. He had not returned to Vanceton, and there were rumors that he had gone to Europe. Not even the members of his family were certain of his whereabouts.

I entered my father's law business, and life for the next several years became a constant round of lawsuits, deeds, wills, and mortgages. The march of years brought their usual changes; my father died, and Mortimer Brandon followed not long after. Then came my marriage to Martha Carewe.

It was shortly after the birth of my son, Charles, in 1901, that I heard from Dick Brandon again. A note sent by one of the servants at the Brandon mansion reached me at my law office.

"Dear Bob:

The prodigal has returned. Could you come up to see me as soon as convenient?

Dick."

As might be expected, I lost no time in going up to see Brandon. I found him but little changed for his travels. His features had matured, true enough, but his black hair was still as thick and crisp-curling as ever, and the same questing spirit seemed to gleam in his gray eyes.

We shook hands. "The prodigal," I said.

Brandon smiled. "Home at last."

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"It's been six years since I saw you," I said. "Dick, where on earth have you been?"

"Just about everywhere, Bob. Europe. India. China. Tibet."

"Seeking?"

"Seeking, Bob."

"And the answer?" I asked. "Have you found it?"

BRANDON nodded gravely. "I've found it, Bob." His gray eyes seemed to darken, as though looking back over the years and the seeking. "I did not find the answer in Europe. The thinkers there are concerned too much with things that can be felt and seen. I found the answer among the mystics of the East—an answer that lay before me all the time, if I had but been wise enough to see it.

"Time, Bob, is a mental conception arising out of the evidences of change around us. We see the eternal merging of night into day, the passing of seasons. We see our friends mature and grow old. We see our children born and grow old in turn. In every possible way, changes are taking place around us—in nature, in people, in our environments. Most of these changes are very gradual, and we are aware of them only in the vaguest way. But we are aware of them, Bob, and we react to them.

"It is as though we were in sympathy with the changes going on around us, changing with them. We see our friends, relatives, and children grow old, and regarding it as something natural, logical, and inevitable, we grow old ourselves. But, Bob, old age is not a biological circumstance forced upon us. It is a biological reaction we make to the changing world in which we live." Brandon leaned toward me; his gray eyes glittered.

"Bob, old age is neither logical nor inevitable. It is a bogey, a myth, which we have come to accept as real. We've been deluded by the changes taking place around us. It is simply a thing of the mind. Shut it from your mind, recognize it for what it is—a bogey and a myth—and it is no longer real."

"That's a very difficult thing to do," I pointed out.

Brandon shook his head. "It is—if you choose to remain in the world of change. How can you exclude a thing from your thoughts if you are being constantly reminded of it? The thing to do is to avoid all sight, sound, and knowledge of change, seclude yourself from it in every possible way."

I stared at him as a dismaying thought occurred suddenly to me. "Good Lord, Dick, you can't possibly have anything like that in mind!"

"Yes. The proof of the pudding, they say, is in the eating. I'm going to prove that my ideas are correct."

"But, Dick, it's mad! There's so much of interest in life. You can't shut yourself away like a hermit."

"But it's the thing I'm going to do, Bob. I've already made arrangements. I'm having a room prepared on an upper floor of the house, equipped with everything I'll ever need. It will have a dumb-waiter system by which food and other necessities can be sent to me, and my only communication with the outside world will be through occasional notes.

"Within that room, Bob, I shall be protected from knowledge of change as much as possible. There will be no clocks, no calendars, no newspapers. The windows are being walled in so that I shall never see the passing of night and day. Heating and ventilating arrangements will be such that I shall never know the passing of seasons. There will still be changes, of course, but slight ones, and I shall close my mind to them."

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"Dick, you can't do this!" I cried in protest. "You'll be wasting your life."

"Not wasting it, but prolonging it as much as possible," Brandon insisted gently.

"But it's insane!"

"Look at me," Brandon commanded. "Do I look insane?"

"No, Dick, not that. But you're held in the grip of an idea which in itself is insane."

"Then let me prove it, Bob. And no more arguments. My mind is made up." Brandon took a deep breath, as though the matter had been conclusively settled. He became suddenly business-like. "Now, Bob, I want you to handle all my affairs for me, so that I'll never need to be bothered with a single thing. By this I mean I want you to look after my various business interests, stocks, securities, and the like, and also to take care of any legal or financial matters that may arise. And I want you to see that the house is always properly staffed and equipped. In general, you are to be my *alter ego* in the world of change."

THE Brandon wealth came from a number of sources, and handling it was going to be no easy thing. We worked out details, talking late into the evening. Then we had dinner, and finally I rose to leave.

I shook Brandon's hand. It was as though I shook the hand of a man about to die, for I was never to see him again.

"Good-bye, Dick."

"Good-bye, Bob."

The door closed behind me.

The busy years passed. There were further additions to my family—a boy, George, and then a girl, Patricia. The electric light came, the automobile, and then moving pictures. Vanceton grew and became a thriving little city. Then the World War, and 1917, with American boys fighting in France. Charles ran away to join the army, and was killed in the battle of Chateau Thierry.

The Armistice and the wave of prosperity that followed. Prohibition. Speakeasies and bootleg whiskey and gang murders. The advent of radio. Then—1929, and the crash of the stock market.

Fortunately, the Brandon wealth was not wiped out entirely; there were still a few sources which could be depended upon for a steady flow of money. But the situation was such that I felt a discussion of it with Brandon was urgently necessary.

Twenty-eight years had passed since Brandon told me of his plan to shut himself away from the world. I'd been reminded of him often during that time by matters pertaining to the Brandon estate, but such a long interval had elapsed that I doubt I thought of him as an actual, living person. It was more in the way that one recalls a memory of a person who has been rather than one who is still alive. Now, furnished with a suitable pretext for a visit, I became anxious to see him again, as though he had been away for a long time and had just returned.

The Brandon mansion looked like an unkept mausoleum when I arrived. The old servant who opened the door stared at me in surprise.

"I'd like to see Mr. Brandon," I said.

"But Mr. Brandon never sees anyone, sir!" he replied.

"I'm sure he'll see me. This is very important. A matter concerning Mr. Brandon's finances."

It was the word finances that did it. The servant hesitated only a moment further, then opened the door and beckoned for me to enter. The interior of the house was dark and silent and

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musty as a tomb. I was led into the kitchen, where a dumb-waiter system was set in the wall.

The servant took a pencil and a pad of paper from a nearby table and held them out to me. "Write down what you wish to say, sir. Mr. Brandon will decide if he wants to see you."

I scrawled a short note.

"Dick:

Have to see you concerning your money. It's very important.

Bob."

The servant sent the note up the dumb-waiter. After some ten minutes during which I fidgeted with impatience, the dumb-waiter descended with an answer.

"Bob:

I'd rather you hadn't come, but if it's as important as you say, I'll see you.

Dick."

THE servant led me to the door of a room on the second floor. He motioned for me to knock, then turned away.

I knocked. After a moment the door opened. I entered the room to find Brandon standing before me.

I gaped in surprise at sight of him. I was fifty-eight, and my hair was turning white—but he looked the same as when I had last seen him that day in 1901! He seemed pale and a bit thinner, but that was all.

Brandon chuckled softly. "I was right, wasn't I, Bob?"

"It would seem so," I managed to answer. "Good Lord, Dick, I can hardly believe it!"

Brandon chuckled again. "Do you doubt the evidence of your eyes?"

"I'm trying not to," I said.

Brandon gazed at me with sudden sadness. "Change, Bob, it's written all over you. Your hair is gray, and you've put on weight. There are lines in your face."

"I've no regrets," I told him. "I've lived a full life, and in many ways, a happy one."

Brandon shrugged. "I'm glad you're satisfied, Bob. As for myself, I have no regrets, either. I've managed to escape the hand of time. I conquered it, Bob. I proved I was stronger, wiser, than time itself." Exultation rang in his voice.

I wondered if it was true. Had Brandon actually managed to conquer time—or had he effected only a temporary escape?

I did not voice my doubts. I spoke of the business matter which had brought me. Brandon was worried.

"Bob, I wouldn't want anything to happen which would force me out into the world of change. Are you sure there will be enough money coming in to keep the house and servants?"

"Fairly sure," I answered. "But we'll have to be very careful until we know just what sort of conditions will follow the crash. There might be a quick return to normal, or there might be a long period of depression."

"Watch things, Bob," Brandon cautioned me anxiously. "Watch them as carefully as you can."

We spoke of finances a while longer, and then, since Brandon would permit me to reveal nothing of the vast changes that had taken place in the outside world, there was nothing more to say. I rose to leave.

Brandon's features were somber. "Bob, you brought change in here with you. I don't like it. Please don't come again until it amounts practically to a life or death matter."

I nodded. We shook hands. The door closed behind me, shutting Brandon into his little world of timelessness.

The Depression. Breadlines and pov-

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erty and hopelessness. "Mister, can you spare a dime?"

Then Roosevelt, the NRA, and the WPA. The slow and gradual climb back to recovery.

I nursed the Brandon finances along, and with the return to prosperity, the driblets became trickles, and finally a steady flow. Brandon's expenses were small, and the money began to accumulate, until, with the boom years ushered in by the Second World War, a quite sizeable fortune had piled up.

Then came catastrophe, as far as Brandon's hopes for seclusion from the world of change were concerned. It came from a source from which I'd never expected trouble.

THE Brandon family had never been a large one. Dick Brandon had a sister, who had died some years before. The sister had married and had brought two children into the world, a boy and a girl. It was these two who now, obviously despairing of inheriting the Brandon wealth by the normal means of Dick Brandon's death, were suing to have him declared legally insane and the Brandon estate turned into their hands. The story of Dick Brandon's strange seclusion was quite common knowledge in Vanceton, and his nephew and niece were using it to profitable advantage.

As Brandon's lawyer, I was presented with a summons ordering his appearance in court, and was advised that there would be a mental examination by a board of psychiatrists.

It was a crisis. It was the life or death matter of which Brandon had spoken.

I went to see Brandon, and I explained the situation to him. Fifteen years had passed since my last visit, but he was still essentially the Dick Brandon of 1901. His hair was raven black, with no slightest sign of white, and his eyes were clear and gray, and never a wrinkle marred the youthfulness of his face.

Brandon, when I finished explaining, was as near terror as I've ever seen in another man. "My God, Bob, I can't leave here. I just can't!"

"You've got to, Dick, for your own good. The law can compel you. Or it can have you declared insane and strip you of your wealth."

Brandon covered his face with his hands. "Bob—I'm afraid."

"Don't be silly, Dick," I said impatiently. "You're just behind the times. You're just afraid to face a world that's passed you by. This is something that's got to be faced. And it shouldn't take long. You should be able to convince the psychiatrists quickly enough of your sanity."

I argued the matter from every possible angle, but it wasn't until I was almost exhausted that I finally won Brandon over. He nodded, weary from the verbal battering I had given him.

"I'll do it, Bob. I'll appear in court."

His submittal was at first hopeless and fatalistic, but later, seeming to accept the fact that he had no other alternative than to emerge from his shell of seclusion, he became almost eager.

"I wonder what I'll find, Bob," he told me. "A great many changes must have taken place."

"You'll see," I replied.

Brandon's clothing was of another era, and the first move to bringing him back into the world was to outfit him with modern garments. Everything was new and novel to him, and he exclaimed over every change like an excited boy.

"The collar is fixed to the shirt? Imagine that! This coat—how short they've become! What did they do,

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cut everything down? Look at these shoes. Where are the tops?"

"They're called oxfords. They have no tops."

"What's this thing, here?"

"It's called a zipper fastener."

"How do you knot this tie, Bob?"

"I'll show you."

Then we left the house and walked to the driveway where I had parked my car. Brandon stared at it, blinking in the sunlight.

"What's that thing?"

"It's an automobile, Bob. Runs by itself. Wait'll you hear a radio and see a movie!"

I stared at Brandon as he climbed into the seat beside me. Was I mistaken, or was he actually older than he had appeared while up in his room?

I forgot about it a moment later, for as I started the car, Brandon began exclaiming anew, eager questions bubbling to his lips. The operation of the car fascinated him. The length and smoothness of the concrete road was a delight and a surprise.

An army plane buzzed high overhead as we drove along. Brandon's eyes followed it out of sight, and when he had gotten over his amazement, he turned to me with more questions. I had a difficult time answering them as fast as they came.

Something about Brandon puzzled me. I'd noticed again the fact that he seemed older, and now I was sure of it. There were lines in his face which had somehow escaped my notice earlier, and I could detect a few strands of gray in his hair.

We were in Vanceton proper, cruising through the downtown district. Traffic lights. Policemen with shrilling whistles. Hurrying crowds. Advertising signs. Storefronts ablaze with color. Brandon absorbed everything with devouring eyes.

"Change, Bob. What wonderful changes! It's like a dream. I can't believe it's real!"

I parked the car, and we walked along the street. Newstands. Colorful stacks of magazines. Newspaper headlines that screamed of war.

"Who are the Nazis? Who is this man Hitler?

A movie theatre. Betty Grable. Hedy Lamarr. Tyrone Power. Bing Crosby.

"What kind of a place is this? Are those people in the pictures actors?"

I stammered slightly as I answered. Brandon's temples were gray, and the lines were deep in his face.

"Bob, why do you look at me like that? What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing, Dick."

Light, color, movement. People walking with feverish haste. Screeching of brakes, blare of horns, shrilling of whistles, in a continuous cacophony of sound. The never-ceasing thunder of a modern city.

Automobiles, aircraft, radio, television, the electric light, movies. Haste, haste, haste! Light and sound in a kaleidoscope that jarred the senses. War. The Second World War. American troops in Africa. American troops landing in Sicily.

Change, change, CHANGE! Change that hit and tore and burned and gnawed. Change that aged.

"Bob—why do you look at me like that? Bob—answer me!"

Change on every hand. Change that met every glance of the eye. Change that roared in the ears.

The courthouse. Brandon and I, walking up the steps.

"What's wrong with me, Bob? It's so hard to climb these steps. I'm tired. My eyes, Bob. What's the matter with my eyes? Everything is so blurry. I

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can't see clearly."

Raven hair as white as snow. Lines that gouged deep as though torn there by talons. Sunken cheeks, and gray eyes turned bleary. Veined, skinny hands that shook.

"Bob, I can't go any further. I've got to rest awhile . . . Bob, everything is turning black—I can't breathe. Bob! Oh God, Bob, what's wrong? Bob . . ."

He died in my arms, there on the courthouse steps.

THE END

SIAMESE WATCHCATS

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

SIAMESE cats are the upper-crust of catdom. They are an acquired taste, and once a cat fancier acquires it, all other cats seem common in comparison. The reason that they are held in such high regard is that they are warrior cats. Not the type that you hear yowling in the backyard at 2:00 A. M., but a much grander species.

In their native Siam, Siamese cats have been used for centuries in place of watchdogs, being trained to recognize and attack marauders. The walls of the Royal Palace at Bangkok and the official residence at Nakon Sritamaraj were until quite recently, patrolled by cats bred and trained especially for that purpose. While on duty, the cats make no attempt to leave their sentry walk unless someone starts to climb over the wall or force a gate. Then they spring on the invader's back, commando fashion, and dig in with all four feet. It is impossible for the victim to get rid of the cat because it is trained to land just below the shoulder blades where you can't reach it.

A Siamese cat's eyes are usually blue, but when they are angered, they turn bright red. Evil people in even the most remote Siamese villages, where watchcats are as common as watchdogs in other countries, respect and fear these cats of Mars. In ancient times Siamese soldiers carried these cats along with them into battle and used them for surprise attacks.

The royalty in Siam have always thought so highly of its cats that the theft of a palace cat is still, after three hundred years, technically punishable by death.

There is a legend that a ruling monarch about to leave for the wars, gave the queen his most prized possession, his ring, and told her to put it in a safe place. So after his departure the queen slid it over the tail of her favorite cat and tied a knot in the cat's tail so that the ring would not slip off. This knot became permanent and all the kittens sired by this cat had this distinguished deformity. Because of this myth, many a cat with a broken tail was sold to a trusting Siamese who believed that he was buying a palace cat.

RINGS OF DEATH

★ By FRANCES YERXA ★

HANNIBAL was a great and courageous Carthaginian general (247-183 B. C.). More than death itself, he feared capture by his worst enemies, the Romans. He had reason for this fear because they knew of his extreme cruelty to prisoners and would have taken much satisfaction in getting back at him. So when Hannibal went into battle he always wore a ring with a hollow bezel in which he kept a powerful dose of poison. When the day of his defeat came and he was to be delivered to the Romans by Prusias, King of Bithynia, he opened the bezel of his ring and swallowed the poison. That was the end of him.

Hollow "poison" rings were used a great deal in those times not only as a method of suicide but as a fatal weapon, a convenient instrument of murder. These rings were constructed with a great deal more skill than our modern jewelers are capable of. The ancients were well acquainted with the art of making vegetable poisonings that were as speedy as our modern strychnine.

One poison ring in the Britsh museum of Venetian workmanship is a heavily engraved hoop, and the setting consists of a pointed diamond on each side of which are two cabochon-cut rubies. By touching a spring at the side of the bezel holding the diamond a space is revealed which holds the poison. This type of ring was popular with princes of medieval times. Cesare Borgia, of the homicidal Borgias, had a ring of this type. His ring consisted of two lions' heads which he

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turned inward toward his palm when he wanted to shake the hand of a "friend" whom he didn't care to see around anymore. The lions' teeth were sharp and hollow and were like those of a viper spewing poison into its victim.

Neither suicide or murder was the intention in the strange case of death by accident with a poison ring during the middle of the last century. A young man walked into a small art shop in France and was examining an ancient ring when he noticed that he had scratched himself slightly with a sharp protruding part of the ring. It didn't bother him right away and he continued to bargain with the shopkeeper. Suddenly he felt a tingling sensation throughout his entire body and his facilities became paralyzed.

A doctor was summoned and after an examination, said that the patient was suffering from poisoning. Antidotes were given and the young man recovered for a time. A study was made of the ring and it was found to be a "death" ring in use in Venice during the seventeenth century. Mounted on the ring were lions' claws made of sharpest steel and having clefts in them filled with particles of poison. How the poison got there, no one ever knew for sure. The French newspapers said that it had probably been placed there by some Venetian prince, and had remained untouched for nearly three centuries.

As a direct opposite, hollow rings have also been used to carry perfume. Some tiny mechanism allowed the wearer to discharge a spray of perfume. These glamorous rings did not have the same popularity as the poison rings.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOON

☆ By H. R. STANTON ☆

LONG before the days of written history, the moon held a place of interest to mankind exceeded only by the sun. The idea of a man in the moon because if its appearance goes back to ancient time. Other legends claim that there is a lady in the moon, or a cat, hare, or toad. In the Middle Ages it was thought that the moon's surface was smooth like a mirror and that the dark spots were reflections of the earth on the moon. Nothing definite was known about the moon until 1609 when Galileo turned his telescope on it and revealed that the markings were mountains and valleys. Of course today with our more powerful telescopes we have been able to learn a great deal more. We are able to get a view through our largest telescopes which is equivalent to what we would get with the naked eye if the moon were only fifty miles away. We would be able to see large ships or Zeppelins moving about.

The moon is the earth's nearest neighbor, being only 240,000 miles away. It has a diameter of 2,160 miles, a little more than one-fourth that of the earth. The gravity force on the moon is only about one-sixth as strong as that on the earth, so if you weigh 120 pounds on earth you would weigh approximately 20 pounds on the moon. If you can jump four feet on the earth, you could jump twenty-four feet on the moon. Sometimes the moon may look to be a fairyland but astronomy tells us that the surface of the moon is barren, a lifeless place of eternal silence and desolation as there is neither air nor water on the moon. For that reason there can be no major change in the moon. There are no winds or rain or wild rivers and ocean waves to wear away the rocks and change the contours. The only thing that can happen is the cracking of rocks due to the expansion and contraction with temperature changes or by the impact of meteors.

There are ten mountain ranges on the moon. Some of the peaks are 20,000 feet in height. The largest range, the lunar Apennines, extends in a curve for 640 miles and includes more than 3,000 tall peaks. One of the most interesting features of the moon's surface are the great cracks. They are in straight lines and about a half a mile wide. Some are several hundred miles long. It looks as though the surface had cracked open in many places. A rather curious feature of the moon's surface are the "rays." These are light-colored streaks radiating out of some of the craters for over a hundred miles. Similar to the clefts, they run over mountains and valleys without regard for the type of territory covered. Some say that they are stains on the rocks caused by gases rising from the narrow cracks in the moon. Perhaps, due to the cracking of the moon's surface and the impact of millions of meteors, the moon is covered with a pulverized stone. Recent experiments seem to indicate that it is covered with a volcanic ash.

Temperature measurements of the moon's surface made by a thermocouple, an electrical thermometer so delicate that it can measure the heat of a candle placed a mile out in space, reveal an interesting fact. Due to the slow rotation of the moon on its axis, any spot on its surface has daylight for fourteen of our terrestial days and nights, and then darkness for the same length of time. This thermocouple shows that during the long lunar days the temperature goes up to the boiling point, or about 212 degrees Fahrenheit. During the long lunar night, the temperature falls to 200 degrees below zero.

So the beautiful, romantic moon continues its course around the earth, a barren, lifeless body whose rocky surface is alternately boiling hot and extremely cold.

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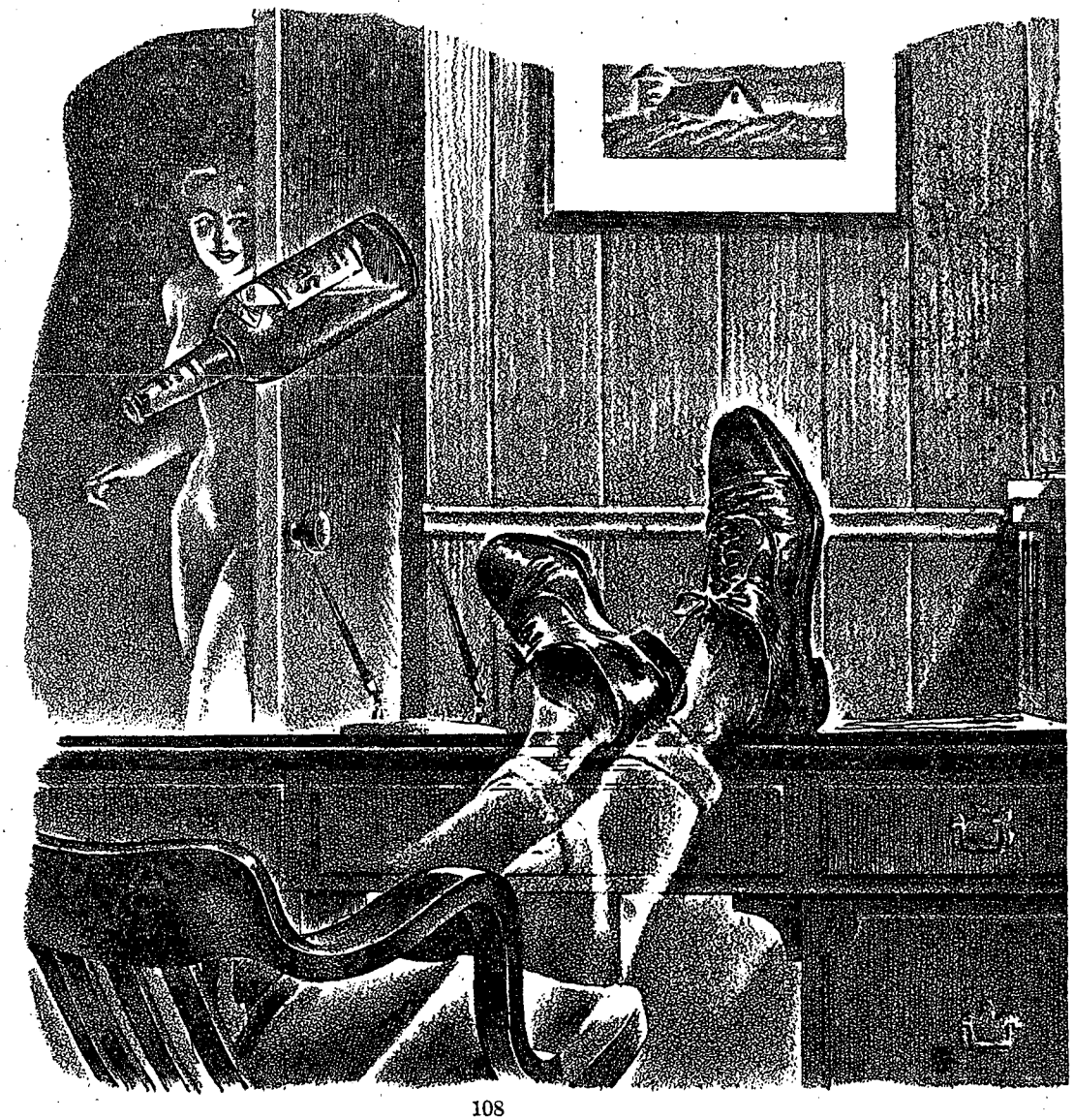
Toffee Haunts A Ghost

by CHARLES F. MYERS

AS A rule, in moments of acute peril, most faces can be relied upon to arrange themselves into the traditional expressions of open-mouthed, pop-eyed terror. Not so, however, the willful countenance of Marc Pillsworth. The lean Pillsworth phiz, openly disdainful of the accepted manifestations of fear, regally side-stepped into something that looked curiously like tight-



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lipped primness. At the moment it had tied itself into such a knot of horror as to appear downright priggish. As the sidewalk split under Marc's feet, throwing him against the unforgiving granite of the Regent Building, the only expletive vigorous enough to force its way through his tightly pursed lips was a sadly depleted, but nonetheless determined "damn."

What had just transpired was extremely upsetting, also quite impossible. Now, if Marc had been careless about looking where he was going. . . . But he hadn't. He had been fully aware of the suspended safe . . . an object of considerable tonnage by the look of it . . . and its precarious position outside the sixth story window. Dangling threateningly out over the street like that, how could he have missed it? He had even taken special care to keep well outside the roped-off safety area. And yet, when the pulley had slipped, and

Having Toffee the "dream-girl" around was bad enough for Marc, but a ghost named George was just too much

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the safe begun to fall, it was as though the great hand of Satan, himself, had taken hold of it and hurled it directly at Marc. It had missed him not by inches, but by the merest fraction of an inch. It was impossible that it should have happened that way; all the laws of physics forbade it. However, for Marc, the morning was already fairly bristling with impossibilities, and while this was not the least of them, neither was it the greatest. Staring apprehensively at the great black lump, now imbedded in the sidewalk, he wondered if it were going to leap from its resting place and crush him against the wall. He wouldn't have been the least bit surprised if it had. In the last few hours he'd come to expect almost anything.

"Damn," he repeated breathlessly.

"You hurt, Bud?"

Marc directed bewildered eyes toward the entrance of the building and saw a workman running swiftly toward him. "No," he said weakly. "It missed me. I'm all right . . . I think. If you want me to sign a statement to that effect, I'll be glad to." He leaned down to flick a bit of cement dust from his trouser cuff and, because of a hand that was trembling badly, did a more complete job than was strictly necessary.

If there was a hand, though, that had every right to tremble, it was the hand of Marc Pillsworth. Actually, it was a wonder the thing wasn't thrashing about like a hooked tuna. His nerves, by now, were as taut and as prickly as the strands on a barbed wire fence.

IT HAD all started early that morning when absenteeism had reared its unlovely head among the ranks of his shirt buttons, thereby making him miss his bus. But Marc, long since hardened to life's minor misfortunes, had waited for a replacement, kissed Julie goodbye at the completion of repairs, and gone in search of a taxi with a certain amount of equanimity. And he had even managed not to be too dismayed when, after going to some lengths to snare a cab, the perverse vehicle had had a flat only two blocks from the apartment. It was not until, upon stepping out of the cab to inquire about the delay, he had looked up to see a truck, out of control, heading directly for him . . . it was not until then that he finally came to the bitter realization that the routineness of the morning had been irrevocably shattered.

After picking himself stiffly out of a nearby hedge, into which he had hastily retreated for safety, and making sure that no one was injured, Marc had signed an injury waiver, shaken the dust from his soiled dignity and gone quietly in search of other transportation. Even then, all things being equal, the morning might still have resolved itself into a fair semblance of normalcy. Only all things were just about as equal as a private and a general on pay day. If Marc had only known it, further disaster, just three blocks distant, was already rushing toward him in the person of a bundle-laden, middle-aged woman, hurriedly returning home from an early-morning expedition to the neighborhood market.

The woman had walked sightlessly into Marc just as he stepped from the curb. Ordinarily, such an incident would have meant only a hasty exchange of insincerities. It would have, that is, if it hadn't happened on the very brink of a workman's ditch where some new and very iron pipe was being laid. Catapulted head-first into the trench, Marc would certainly have died of assorted abrasions and fractures if a beefy workman hadn't been standing in precisely the right spot to cushion

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his fall.

He had signed two waivers that time.

After that, it had only been the negligible journey of five blocks to the incident of the falling safe. It would seem that the fates, gotten up on the murderous side of the bed, were going a bit out of their way to give Marc an untimely nudge into the hereafter.

Now, after quaveringly signing papers for the Regent people, he hurried away from the building and started down the sidewalk. With a rather harassed expression replacing the one of prim fright, he moved toward the corner bus stop. After all, he thought, even if it was only a few more blocks to the office, he would probably do better to play it safe and put himself in the mechanized hands of the city bus company. They'd always taken good care of him before. Besides, his knees were feeling a trifle unhinged.

A small group had already assembled at the corner to await the arrival of the bus, and Marc drew close to it. He wanted to dispel the uneasy feeling that he alone had been singled out and set apart for disaster. He wanted the feeling of safety that is always inherent in any human gathering, no matter how small. It was unfortunate that this gregarious impulse only led to the brutal trampling of a delicate foot, the property of the most attractive lady in the assemblage.

"Ouch!" yelled Marc's diminutive victim. "You crazy ox!" She glanced significantly at Marc's feet. "Why don'tcha look where you're puttin' them big hooves? You could cripple a girl fer life!"

"Sorry," Marc murmured embarrassedly. "Terribly sorry."

"I should think *so!*" The girl turned away, still mumbling fretfully.

Edging back, Marc continued to stare at the girl. She reminded him of someone. But who was it? The angry flash of her green eyes, the flaming red of her hair, even the arrogant, curving lines of her supple young body were strongly reminiscent of someone he had once known. His wife? He immediately vetoed the idea. Julie was a stately blonde, and her eyes were blue.

Who then? Someone he'd dreamed? Marc's heart suddenly did a quick backflip. Why Toffee, of course. Toffee!

MARC glanced nervously at the people about him. For a moment he was almost afraid that he'd called out aloud. But apparently he hadn't, for no one was looking at him. Wasn't it odd, he thought, how Toffee faded from his memory almost the moment she was out of sight. Maybe it was because her existence sprang from so strange a source . . . from the depths of his own subconscious mind. Maybe it was because she was really a part of him that he thought of her so seldom; it would be almost like keeping constantly in mind one's liver or kidneys. His smile was almost wistful as his memory returned to that hectic morning when he'd seen Toffee for the first time . . . outside his dreams. Titian-haired mistress of his subconscious, it had been quite a shock when she had decided to materialize from his dreams, assume physical proportions and step full-blown, as it were, right into the center of his waking hours. Her penchant for building the quietest situation into an affair of raging insanity had made itself distressingly apparent right from the start. And yet, Marc had to admit it, she also possessed a rather endearing aptitude for clearing up the snarls in his life . . . even if her methods were somewhat devious at times. Yes, Toffee was sweet in her way . . . sweet, like a sugar-coated time bomb. Almost

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affectionately, Marc wondered what she was doing in his subconscious this morning. Probably seething with anger that he hadn't admitted her to his dreams last night so that she might have a hand in the morning's mishaps. Falling into ditches, being nearly crushed under safes or run down by trucks would be her notion of a real frolic; such was her disposition toward peril and threats of sudden death. Small matters in her gladsome existence. Marc's smile broadened, then vanished as he saw the bus approaching the corner.

Waiting his turn, he absently watched the well-turned ankle of the outraged redhead as its owner moved smartly up the steps, into the bus. That hazard out of the way, he reached for the gleaming handrail and drew himself up to the first step, a little surprised to find that he was still a bit shaky from the morning's excitement. Inside the bus, he steadied himself and reached quickly into his pocket and drew out a handful of change. He searched hastily for the correct fare, found it, and held it out toward the shining collection box. It was just as his hand drew even with the box that the red sedan suddenly came careening across the intersection and headed directly for the bus. It came head-on, for all the world as though its prime purpose in the scheme of things was to demolish the big vehicle. There was a rending, crashing sound, and suddenly all the air was filled with splintering glass and noise. The sound of Marc's fare falling to the floor was lost in the din of the crash.

MARC'S thirty-two years seemed almost to have doubled as he climbed feebly out of the taxi and paid the driver. Turning, he gazed gratefully at the stairs leading to the Pillsworth Advertising Agency and started uncertainly toward them. Actually, though, for a man who had just suffered four consecutive escapes from lacerated death, he was in comparatively good shape. Nevertheless, having one's head wedged into the baggage rack of an interurban bus for over fifteen minutes is an experience that is bound to take its toll. Moving up the steps, Marc weaved and groped his way like a man in a drunken stupor. Finally reaching the door to the outer office, he threw his weight against it, wedged it open, and stumbled inside in a manner sharply reminiscent of the entrance of Dan McGrew into the Malamute Saloon. For a moment he just stood there, his arms dangling lifelessly at his sides, staring stupidly at his employees, who returned the compliment by remaining rigidly spellbound at their desks. Dazed as he was, Marc didn't see the girl coming down the aisle between the desks. And she didn't see him.

A racing cloud of disheveled hair and apparel, she stormed toward Marc in what was obviously a blind rage. The tap of her high heels sounded against the floor with the rapidity of a riveting machine, and an enormous handbag flapped angrily against her slender thigh. It wasn't until she was nearly abreast of Marc that she finally noticed him.

At the sight of Marc, the girl came to a sudden, jerking halt, as though she had run full-tilt against the face of a brick wall. More than that, she looked just as stunned. Going tensely rigid, like a cardboard cut-out of her self, she drew her arms stiffly to her sides, closed her eyes and screamed till it seemed that her vocal chords would snap under the strain. True and strong, her voice shrilled through the office ripping the silence to shreds. Finally completing this awful recital with a flourish right out of the Lucia mad scene, she opened her eyes and pointed a commanding

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finger at Marc.

"Stay where you are, Mr. Pillsworth!" she bleated. "One step and I'll scream!"

"You've already screamed," Marc reminded her thickly. "And you really mustn't do it any more."

"If you move," the girl replied vehemently, "I'll not only do it some more, but louder!"

Marc's blood ran cold at the thought. "Oh, don't," he pleaded. "Please. "Whatever the trouble is, I'm sure we can . . ." Holding out a placating hand, he swayed toward her.

"Get away!" the girl yelped with honest terror. "Get away, you . . . you wolf!" And grasping her handbag firmly by its straps, she took hasty aim at Marc's head and arranged a resounding introduction of the two.

Under the impact of the bag, which seemed to be harboring at least a couple of flat irons, Marc sat down heavily on the floor, like a sack of soggy meal. In the blurred starlit confusion that followed, he was vaguely aware of tapping heels and the thunderous slam of a door.

AFTER a moment, in which the spinning universe settled down to a more reasonable pace, Marc prodded his head with a cautious finger and, finding it still where he'd remembered it, looked up. "What happened?" he asked.

He waited for a reply that was not forthcoming. The agency employees, still rigid at their desks, merely stared back at him with what appeared to be only faintly disguised contempt. Then a door slammed somewhere at the far end of the office and Memphis McGuire, Marc's current secretary, big as the city for which she was named and twice as colorful, swung heavily into view. Just barely avoiding a collision with a desk, she started down the aisle.

Angrily waving a sheaf of papers over her head, her multi-colored dress flapping loosely about her hammy legs, Memphis looked like nothing so much as a circus tent, flag unfurled, being blown along in a typhoon. Reaching Marc, she stopped in front of him, her weight settling itself around her with a sudden shake. She bent down and waved the papers accusingly under his nose.

"You louse!" she bellowed. "You utter, ring-tailed louse!"

Marc stared up into her scowling face like a bewildered child who had just been spanked for saying her prayers. It didn't make sense. None of it. Everyone . . . the world, itself . . . had chosen this day to turn on him. That Memphis, too, should enlist in the ranks of his demented attackers was just too much. He felt like crying. Always, from the very first day of her employment, Memphis had been his staunchest supporter. She had championed his every cause. It was inconceivable that, now, on this mad morning of meaningless outrage, she should turn against him. What had happened? Had she . . . and everyone else in the world . . . gone stark, raving mad?

"Wha . . . what's going on here?" Marc stammered. "Has everyone gone crazy?"

"Crazy is the word!" Memphis thundered. "I must have been clear out of my mind to stay up half the night typing these reports! There's just one thing I want to know. When I sent Miss Hicks into your office with these papers, did you or did you not tell her to go hang them in the lavatory? Just answer me that! That's all!" She straightened up and glowered down at him, a trembling tower of fury. Marc only stared back at her in silent dis-

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belief. "Well, did you!" Her voice pounded against the walls like the beat of a bass drum. "And did you leap at Miss Dugan when she went in with the mail? And chase her around the room! Deny it! I dare you! Just you try and I'll smash the ears right off your two-faced head!"

Marc winced. It didn't seem she was leaving him a very attractive alternative. His ears, though a bit large perhaps, had served him well and faithfully so far, and he was anxious to continue the association. Besides, even if the invitation to rebuttal had been made without threat of disfiguration, he was beginning to doubt his physical ability to accept it. The glove of challenge had been thrown down, but he was too weak even to pick it up. Already, Memphis' angry face was beginning to blur and drift lazily back and forth before him. A curious limpness had come into his body, and he felt himself sagging toward the floor.

"Good grief! He's sick!" Memphis' voice came to him distantly, as though through water. Then he felt her arms about his shoulders, holding him away from the floor. "Well, don't just sit there, you gaping parasites, help me carry him into his office!" Though commanding and brusque, the voice carried a faint overtone of self-reproach.

BEING carried . . . or dragged, as it seemed . . . into the quiet confines of his private office, Marc was only half aware of what was happening. However, as he felt the softness of the lounge beneath him, his head began to clear a little. He opened his eyes. The door was just closing on an assortment of backs and a confusion of whispered conversation. Memphis, sitting in a chair next to the lounge, was staring at him with worried concern.

"I didn't mean to let go at you like that, Mr. Pillsworth," she said regretfully. "But, really, you shouldn't have done it. I was so disappointed."

"Disappointed?" Marc asked weakly. "Shouldn't have done what?"

She waved a hand vaguely through the air. "Oh, everything. Drinking in the office. Making passes at the girls. Chasing them. All the—rest. Somehow it just doesn't seem right to go on like that in a business office."

"Drinking?" Marc looked deeply perplexed. "Who's been drinking?"

"It's all right," Memphis replied soothingly. "And it doesn't matter now that it's all over. I'm sure it won't happen again. Will it?"

Marc raised himself slowly to one elbow. "What won't happen again?" he asked. "What's been going on here, anyway? I demand to know."

"Who knows better than you?" Memphis returned, a touch of temper creeping back into her voice. "Just look at this office."

For the first time Marc turned his attention to his surroundings. The office was a shambles. Paper was strewn everywhere, and in the center of the room, a chair, turned on its back, lay discarded and forlorn. Across from him, by the leg of another chair, a suspicious-looking half-filled bottle stood on the floor. The air was redolent with the odor of liquor. Unbelievingly, Marc swung his legs over the edge of the lounge, rose shakily to his feet, and toddled toward the offending container. Drawing abreast of it, he squatted down and reached for it. Then, blinking incredulously, he withdrew from it, empty-handed. The battering his head had taken that morning must have affected his sight. He could have sworn the bottle moved out of his grasp of its own accord. Shaking his head, he

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turned to Memphis.

"How did that get in here?"

"I guess you hauled it in here when you came in this morning."

"Came in this morning?" Marc was more bewildered than ever. "But I'm just now getting here. I was held up. I had an accident . . . a whole lot of accidents."

Bemusement crept stealthily across Memphis' face. "You weren't here until now?" she asked slowly. "I'd be the last one to call you a liar, but I saw you with my own eyes. So did Miss Hicks and Miss Graham. Oh, Lord, and don't they wish they hadn't!"

Under a wave of dizziness, Marc made his way unsteadily back to the lounge. "You did not," he said fretfully, sitting down. "I wasn't here."

Exasperation finally flashed in Memphis' eyes. "All right," she said unhappily. "So you weren't here. I didn't see you. You're absolutely right, Mr. Pillsworth. And . . . and that isn't all you are!"

She may have said more, but if she did, Marc didn't hear her. As he sank back onto the lounge, the room suddenly started to spin. Then it stopped, and began to fill with writhing, surging waves of blackness. Ink-like liquid was seeping in everywhere, its whispering tide rising swiftly toward him. It was coming so fast! In a moment it covered Memphis, hiding her from view, and he wondered fleetingly why she allowed herself to be submerged without a struggle.

Then, quickly, the blackness washed over the edge of the lounge, and Marc felt himself, light and buoyant, being lifted upward. Up, up and up he moved and then, just as he was nearing the ceiling, there was a terrible sucking sound and he was drawn swiftly downward into unbroken, unending, fluid blackness.

HE MOVED in a drifting delirium that seemed endless and brief all at the same time. Time, hours . . . or were they really minutes? . . . dissolved and were lost beyond remembrance. He drifted lazily through ages, shot fleetingly through racing seconds. Then, just as he had resigned himself to this curious state of timelessness, he was lifted upward once more, and shot out of the darkness, into brilliant, nearly blinding light. Borne on the crest of an ebony wave, he was hurtled forward and heavily deposited on what appeared to be a grassy beach.

He lay flat on his stomach for a time, listening to the dying rumble of the wave. And when it was gone, there was a deep stillness, broken only by the lingering lap-lap of the receding blackness. Rolling over, he saw that he was resting on the topmost point of a grassy knoll. The black waters had entirely disappeared now, and the greenness of the little hill stretched out endlessly in all directions. Here and there, clusters of strange feathery trees swayed gently at the command of a blue vaporous mist. It was so blissfully quiet.

Then something shot past his ear and struck the earth behind him with a soft thud. He turned just in time to see a glistening apple . . . golden and perfectly round . . . rolling down the far side of the mound. He sat up and watched it quizzically.

"Darn!" a voice said shrewishly. "I should have hit him right between his fishy eyes."

Marc swung around, but there was nothing and no one behind him . . . nothing, that is, except one of the strange trees. Curiously alone and aloof, it was the only tree on the little hill. Getting to his feet, Marc moved warily toward it. Then he stopped short as he noticed an odd fluttering

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motion in its foliage. Then, all at once, there was a flash of red along one of the branches, and he wondered if it were afire. He drew closer, then stopped again. What he was really looking at was a mop of agitated red hair. A hand suddenly appeared and brushed the hair aside, and two green eyes, wide with aggravation, glinted down at him.

Marc recognized them at once. "Toffee!" he exclaimed.

"Miss Toffee to you, mushhead," the girl replied hotly. "I shouldn't think you'd have the brass to show your sniveling face around here after the way you've treated me. A crime, that's what it is!"

"What are you doing up there?" Marc asked noncommitally.

"I'm falling out," Toffee snapped. "Right now, I'm just barely dangling by my toes. But in a second I'm going to let go, and if you know what's good for you, you'll catch me. I lost my balance chucking that apple at you."

"Serves you right," Marc said. He stepped forward, under the tree, and looked up. It was true. Toffee was dangling precariously between two branches. Her foot acting as a grappling hook on one branch, her hand grasping the other, she looked like nothing so much as a shapely pink hammock. Her transparent tunic, always an aloof bystander at best, was hanging loosely to one side, unconcerned that its wearer was left shockingly exposed. Marc quickly averted his eyes and held out his arms.

"Okay!" he called. "Let go!"

Toffee came down promptly and heavily, her sudden weight rocking Marc back on his heels. For a moment it was touch and go between the staggering man and the forces of gravity. But Marc finally won out and righted himself. Then, looking down, he discovered, to his horror, that Toffee had landed face-down in his arms. Obviously, certain adjustments needed to be made immediately. With a timid hand, Marc tried to do what he could about them.

"Stop pawing me, you wrinkled adolescent!" Toffee yelled. "Put me down!"

And with that, she sank two talon-like fingernails into the flesh of Marc's thigh. Marc's trousers might just as well have been made of tissue for all the protection they afforded him against the cutting nails.

WITH a piercing scream of agony, he promptly gave Toffee over to the ground, where she landed with a resounding thump. "You little beast!" he cried, clutching his leg. "Of all the ingratitude!"

Toffee looked up owlishly from over her shoulder. "I told you to put me down," she said vindictively. "Surely, you didn't expect me to just hang there while you made finger prints all over my—"

"I was only trying to set you right," Marc cut in quickly.

"Hah!" Toffee jumped lightly to her feet. "From now on," she said, placing a slender hand on a sculptured hip, "I'll take care of my own setting, and don't you ever forget it."

"Do what you like with your precious setting," Marc put in, his irritation mounting. "See if I care. You can hurl the fool thing out the window for all of me."

"I wouldn't even tilt it over the sill for the best part of you," Toffee sneered. "Not after the torture you've been putting me through lately."

"I torture *you!*" Marc laughed bitterly. "That's good, that is!"

"Then what do you call it?" Toffee made a quick gesture that encompassed

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the whole of the valley. "How would *you* like to be locked up in this place months on end? The valley of your mind! Hah! The sump hole would be more like it. You haven't had an original thought in the last six months."

"You're so depraved," Marc said, rising to his own defense, "you wouldn't know an original thought if you saw one. And if you think I'm going to dedicate my days to the contemplation of smut, just for your sweet sake, you're mistaken. Just because you're nasty minded, doesn't mean the rest of us are."

"Why you hypocritical old heller!" Toffee flared. "Some of the thoughts you've had were enough to singe the hair right off a censor's head. It makes me fairly blush sometimes, just being in the same mind with them."

"I've a fine picture of that!" Marc snorted. "You haven't got a modest blush left to your name."

Toffee shrugged her shoulders. "Anyway," she said, "you might at least have dreamed me up in time for the excitement this morning. The one morning in your dull life when something happens, and you keep me chained up in your subconscious!"

Marc's features suddenly fell into lines of deep meditation. The morning and its frantic adventures had gone completely out of his memory until now. Toffee's remark had stirred vague remembrances. All of it was slowly coming back.

Toffee started toward him with sudden concern. "What's wrong, Marc?" she asked softly. "Is it anything I can help with? Even if you are a low viper, I still love you, you know. I guess I just can't help it."

Marc shook his head. "I don't quite know what's wrong myself," he said slowly. "That is, I know what's happened, but I don't know why."

"You sound a little mixed up."

"I am. All mixed up."

Then they both swung quickly around as an odd lap-lapping sounded softly behind them. At the foot of the mound, the black tide was already rising swiftly toward them, each successive surge blotting out more and more of the little valley. For a moment, they just stood looking at it, too surprised to move.

"Here we go again," Toffee said happily, turning to Marc.

Her voice seemed to wake him from a sort of trance. "Go again?" he asked. "We?" A frightened look came into his eyes. "No! No, you don't. Things will be bad enough without you!"

"Oh, don't be silly," Toffee giggled. Then seeing that the speeding tide was already near their feet, she suddenly turned to Marc and swung her arms around his neck. "You need me."

"Let go!" Marc yelled. He ducked, tried to break her grasp, but it was no use. Then it was too late. All at once, the tide caught them up and hurled them toward the sky. And just as it seemed they were going to touch the clouds, there was a horrible sucking sound and they were drawn down into the inner current of the flowing blackness.

THE light of day returned to Marc slowly and without welcome. Partly opening one eye, he wished he hadn't, for his head instantly began pulsing like a heavily burdened steam engine pulling out of a mountain way-station. Somewhere there was a faint, intermittent hissing sound, which Marc expected was probably caused by gases shooting rhythmically from his ears. He opened the other eye and tried to clear his head by concentration. But the hissing continued. He lay back and turned his attention to the restful blank-

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ness of the ceiling. When Toffee's pert, puckish face swam into view just above his own, he was only mildly surprised. After everything else, it seemed only to be expected.

"It's so lovely to be materialized again," she sighed happily. "I feel all alive and wonderful. I even begin to like you a little." Unmoved by these glad tidings, Marc nodded absently and closed his eyes again. "You look simply awful," she added.

"You wouldn't win any titles, yourself," Marc mumbled, "if you'd been kicked, pummeled and bashed all over town like I have."

"What happened. Who kicked you?"

Sitting up and holding his head in his hands, Marc tried to give her a brief and coherent summary of his havoc-ridden journey to the office. Also, he included the depressing welcome afforded him by the staff upon arrival.

"Very strange," Toffee mused, moving thoughtfully around the disordered room. "Something has obviously gone amiss."

"Amiss!" Marc groaned. "Something's gone completely berserk." Suddenly he stopped speaking, looked up, and inclined his head in a listening attitude. "Do you hear something?" he asked.

"That hissing sound?" Toffee said. "Gets on your nerves, doesn't it?"

"Thank heaven," Marc sighed. "I thought maybe it was in my head. What do you think it is?"

"Sounds like someone sleeping, breathing heavily," Toffee said. Then her roving eye lit on the half-filled bottle at the other end of the room, and she moved swiftly toward it. She started to reach down for it, then suddenly stopped, tilting her head to one side. "That noise is louder over here." She straightened and pointed to the chair beside the bottle. "It seems to be coming from that."

"Don't be silly," Marc said shortly. "Why would a chair hiss?"

Leaning down again, Toffee extended a slender finger, and jabbed quickly at the cushion of the chair. Instantly, a horrible grunting sound echoed through the room, and she jumped back, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Good grief," a voice said thickly. "Haven't you any sense of decency at all? Keep your prodding fingers to yourself. Go exercise your low instincts somewhere else."

Toffee swung quickly around to face Marc. "This," she said sternly, "is no time to be sitting around throwing your voice. If you must give vaudeville entertainments, go to a cheap theatre where your vulgar talents will be appreciated."

Marc's face twisted with wonder. "I didn't throw anything," he said innocently. "Least of all my voice. But I heard it, and it was awful."

"It *was* your voice," Toffee insisted. "I'd know that rasp anywhere. And if you try it just once more, I'll . . ." Suddenly her voice froze into silence as she saw Marc's expression swiftly change to one of undiluted horror. Slowly, she turned and followed his gaze to the garrulous chair, and promptly started back with a hysterical sob.

"Holy gee!" she breathed. "If that isn't the most hair-raising sight ever!"

FROM the chair an apparently disembodied hand swung downward and grasped the bottle on the floor. Then, even as they watched it, it raised the bottle rakishly over the center of the chair and poured a portion of its contents into . . . into nothing! This done, the hand and bottle moved downward again, and a resounding burp rumbled messily through the room.

"Holy gee!" Toffee repeated breath-

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lessly.

"What . . . what's . . ." The words died in Marc's throat.

The floating hand, now at rest on the arm of the chair, had suddenly been matched by another on the opposite arm. Marc and Toffee, struck dumb by this spectacle, remained rigid, staring with wide-eyed amazement. And as they watched, two feet, as though to add balance to the already gruesome picture, slowly appeared on the floor in front of the chair. After that things seemed to really get under way, and it was only a matter of seconds until, a section at a time, a whole body had come into view, complete with everything . . . except a head.

"Ulp!" The sound came from Marc.

"You said it," Toffee murmured. "I think I'm going to be hysterical." With a shudder she turned away and gazed intently out the window.

"You . . . you see it too?" Marc asked wretchedly.

"I'm doing my level best not to," Toffee replied. "It's the most horrible thing I've ever set eyes on. It's positively haunting. I'd be just as pleased if you wouldn't remind me of it."

"What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know," Toffee returned miserably. "And I don't care. I just want to forget all about it. Maybe if we simply ignore it, it will go away and leave us alone. Let's just look out the window and engage in casual conversation. Maybe it'll get the idea it's not wanted."

"I wonder if it *can* go away?" Marc said. Shakily he rose from the lounge, and with one last tormented glance at the headless figure, moved rapidly to Toffee's side. "Suppose it . . . it can't move . . . any more?"

"It can move all right," Toffee said gloomily. "The way it was whipping that bottle around I wouldn't be surprised to see it get up and start doing an Irish jig, though the mere thought of it makes my flesh fairly scamper."

"That's right," Marc mused. "Whatever it is, it seems to be in splendid working order."

"Too damn splendid," Toffee agreed.

"Maybe we should assert ourselves," Marc suggested. "Maybe we could throw it out."

"I, personally," Toffee replied firmly, "would rather slash my wrists than lay a finger to the clammy thing."

"As I recall," a voice said hollowly from across the room, "you didn't mind in the least laying a finger to me a while ago. And a shockingly intimate finger it was too. In fact I was quite embarrassed by it. And if you two mental cases really want something to do, I suggest you open up that window and throw yourselves out into the street. Your feeble-minded gibbering is keeping me awake."

Marc and Toffee nearly collided as they swung about. Then, in perfect unison, they gasped. The figure, now graced with a head, was glaring at them evilly.

"Wha . . . who?" Marc sputtered. Turning away, slightly, he passed a trembling hand over his eyes, then looked again. "OOooo!" He looked like a man who'd just received a ball bat across the stomach. The face into which he gazed was an exact duplicate of his own. It was like looking at his own reflection . . . only there wasn't any mirror.

"You," the figure observed dryly, "sound like a bilious Indian. For that matter you may be one, for all I know. But, in any case, if you can't say anything intelligent, please go away. I'm very tired."

THIS seemed to jolt Marc out of his state of temporary paralysis. With

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the air of one who had had quite enough, he stepped forward and leveled a long finger at the figure in the chair. "Who . . . who are you?" he asked.

"Why, I'm . . ." The figure turned and regarded Marc closely for the first time. A look of astonishment came into its face. "Who are *you*?" it countered suspiciously.

"I'm Marc Pillsworth," Marc returned impatiently. "This is my office. And whoever you are, and whatever kind of trick you think you're playing, I'll thank you to clear out before I call the police and have you dragged out . . . er . . . bodily." He cleared his throat uneasily. "A section at a time if need be."

Suddenly the figure was on its feet, staring at Marc in unmixed alarm.

"You're lying," it said. "You can't be Marc Pillsworth. I'm Marc Pillsworth . . . at least, in a sense I am." It turned to Toffee. "He isn't Marc Pillsworth, is he?"

"I thought he was," Toffee replied confusedly. "Now I'm not so sure. Right now, I don't even know who I am. Maybe I'm Marc Pillsworth and you two are Toffee. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if it turned out that way."

"He can't be!" the figure insisted. "Marc Pillsworth was due to die at eight-thirty sharp this morning." Suddenly it turned to Marc. "You're dead!" it said firmly. "You'd better stop running around like this. It isn't right. I was ordered here to haunt this place, and how can I do it with you around? It ruins everything. I'm a self-respecting spectre and I won't have this sort of thing. I won't!"

"I'm not dead," Marc snapped peevishly. "And . . . and . . ." Suddenly he stopped short and blinked. "You . . . you're a ghost?"

"Naturally," the figure replied with solemn dignity. "Yours. What did you think? So you see, you simply can't be alive. It just isn't possible. These things just aren't handled that way."

Fearful uncertainty crept into Marc's eyes. "Well," he murmured, "I did have a lot of accidents this morning, and maybe I did . . . I don't feel so good." Suddenly he shook his head. "No! This is insane. I'm just as alive as ever."

"Holy smoke!" the figure cried. "You mean you loused things up and didn't get killed? You're actually here, you and that naked lady?"

Toffee drew her brief tunic closer around her. "Ghost or no ghost," she said icily, "I'll not be referred to as that naked lady."

The ghost looked at her appraisingly. "You may not be any lady," he said, "but you are certainly naked."

"For heaven's sake!" Marc cried desperately. "This is no time to be going on about naked ladies."

"It's as good a time as any," Toffee said pertly. "You stay out of this. It may develop into something interesting." Her hold on the tunic relaxed slightly. "Naked ladies don't grow on trees, you know."

"I don't care if they grow in ash cans!" Marc rasped, a little out of control. "I don't care about naked ladies at all!"

"You don't?" The ghost stared at Marc wonderingly.

"No, I don't! What I care about is this mess you've gotten me into. It's got to be straightened out!"

"Oh, that," the ghost said, suddenly unconcerned. "That's easy, now that I think about it. There was some sort of slip up this morning, but I'm sure it was all your own doing. Our office never makes mistakes. All you have to do now is just bump yourself off, and everything will be all right. Better late

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than never, I suppose."

"What!" The word shot from Marc's mouth like a handful of gravel. "You expect me to commit suicide just for the sake of your precious records! I never heard of anything so callous!"

"Oh, come now, old man," the spirit smiled blandly. "Let's not be sentimental about it. Why don't you just toddle down to the corner and slip quietly under a truck?" Suddenly he burped and his legs, in simultaneous accompaniment, disappeared up to the knees. For a moment he seemed to hover, half-legless, in mid-air. Looking down at this curious phenomenon, he smiled apologetically. "It's the liquor," he said. "Can't handle my ectoplasm worth a damn when I'm drinking." Closing his eyes, he seemed to concentrate a moment, and the legs reappeared in their entirety. He looked up, beaming proudly.

"Oh, good grief," Toffee moaned. "As long as I live I'll never see anything worse than that!"

"And now," the spirit began, turning to Marc, "as I was saying . . ."

"No!" Marc looked like an animal at bay.

MOVING to the chair, the spirit sat down, crossed his legs and elegantly lifted the bottle from the floor. After a long swallow, he looked up and shook his head. "It's on the books that you're dead, and I've got my ectoplasm and a job to do. I don't care what you do, I'm going to stay and haunt this place." He crossed his arms defiantly over his chest.

Marc glanced up peevishly. "*Haunt* this place?" he said sarcastically. "A wrecking crew could do the same thing, if that's what you call it."

"It's the new method," the spirit said languidly. "The old-fashioned moaning and chain rattling is out nowadays. The new haunting manual tells us just to use our own imagination and initiative. You know, make the thing more personal through self-expression." He leaned forward and looked at Marc more closely. "Say, you don't look so good." He held out the bottle. "You better have some of this."

Marc accepted the bottle with hesitation, regarded it suspiciously for a moment, then, with a shrug, took a long drink. After savoring the taste and the feel of the warm liquid, he thoughtfully took another . . . and another.

"Let's not get greedy about this thing!" the spirit said with some show of alarm. "Let's not go overboard. That grog was hard come by. I had to hi-jack a delivery truck and nearly got a free ride to the next city."

"That would have been awful," Marc countered wryly. He returned the bottle and turned to Toffee. "You are naked," he mused. "Awful naked. And things are complicated enough without it. Why don't you trot off and put on some clothes?"

"And where do I get these clothes?"

Marc waved an expansive hand toward a door at the far end of the room. "I think the boys were doing some models in there yesterday. There are probably some clothes left over."

"Good night!" Toffee said, scandalized. "What were those boys doing to the poor things. What, with clothes left over, it must have been awful."

"They were photographing them for ads."

"Oh," Toffee said disappointedly, and pivoting, went to the door. Opening it, she paused a moment to look back. "This won't take long. Don't go away." She stepped into the dimness of the next room, and softly closed the door.

Marc directed his attention back to the spirit. "Now there must be some way out of this, Mr. . . . uh . . ."

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"Just call me George," the spirit said. "It's your second name, you know. You're already using the Marcus part of it yourself."

Marc nodded gravely. "Well, anyway, George, you must understand that this thing can't go any further." George yawned expansively, and Marc increased the volume of his voice. "You've simply got to go, George. I'm sure that . . ."

His voice trailed off into the distant reaches of the room and faded into nothing. George had suddenly disappeared, and a hollow snoring sound rattled ominously from the depths of the now empty-looking chair.

"In here, Miss McGuire?" The voice was Julie's and it came from just beyond the outer door.

Marc leaped to his feet in alarm, started frantically toward the chair, the door to the photographer's room, then, hopelessly, he whirled about, threw himself down on the lounge and closed his eyes tight. Maybe if Julie thought he was sleeping, she would leave. There was the sound of a hand on the door knob.

The door whined open, and muted footsteps sounded on the carpet. From the sound of it, there seemed to be several people, among them a man. Marc wondered desperately who it was, but kept his eyes determinedly shut.

"There he is," came the sound of Memphis' voice, "just as I left him."

"Is that good, doctor?" This time it was Julie's voice, anxious and fearful.

"I really couldn't say, Mrs. Pillsworth. Maybe. Maybe not."

The doctor's voice was a solemn one with sonorous, church-like overtones.

"Well, I'll leave you two with him," Memphis said. "I hope everything will be all right."

"Thanks so much for calling me," Julie returned.

As the door closed with a snap, Marc struggled valiantly against a driving impulse to open his eyes . . . one of them at least . . . just a little.

"Smell the liquor, doctor?" Julie was saying. "This sort of thing has never happened before. I just don't understand it. If what Miss McGuire tells me is true, he's been behaving like a regular hoodlum."

"Sometimes," the doctor replied, "they just snap all of a sudden. There's no telling what sets them off at all. It might be anything."

The footsteps came closer and Marc felt a hand on his shoulder. It shook him gently. "Wake up, dear," Julie's voice cooed. "It's Julie."

MARC opened his eyes and looked up guiltily. Julie's anxious face was just above his own, smiling a tragic little smile. And just beyond her shoulder there was also the face of a man, studious and intelligent in a musty, smug sort of way. Marc disliked it on sight.

"Do you feel very awful?" Julie asked.

Marc nodded. "Yes, dear," he murmured wanly. "Terrible."

Her hand patted his shoulder reassuringly. "Well, everything's going to be all right," she said. "I've brought Dr. Polk to see you. He wants to talk to you."

Marc's thoughts raced wildly as he boosted himself into a sitting position. He glanced nervously at the chair across the room and the door behind which Toffee was dressing. The situation, he felt, was almost too atomic to be endured. It might explode at any minute if he didn't get Julie and the doctor out of there. He regarded the doctor with mistrust.

"I don't want to talk to him," he said peevishly. "I won't."

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Undismayed, the doctor calmly sat down on the edge of the lounge. "You mustn't feel that way, Mr. Pillsworth," he said soothingly. "We're going to be great friends, you and I."

"Want to bet?" Marc scowled. He turned to Julie. "What kind of quack is this guy, anyway?"

"Dr. Polk is a . . . a . . ."

"I'm a psychiatrist," the doctor broke in. "You're suffering from a nervous disorder, Mr. Pillsworth, and I'm here to help you."

Marc's eyes widened with astonishment. They thought he was nuts! What was he . . . ! His mind leaped to other things as the hissing noise from George's chair suddenly increased in volume. They were bound to notice it in a moment.

"I'm all right, doctor," Marc said, his voice unnaturally loud. "I'm perfectly okay. So you see, I really don't need you! It was just a little joke. Hah, hah!" His laugh was false and a little hysterical. "So you can run along back to your nuts . . . ah . . . patients." He glanced nervously at the door to the photographer's room. Everything was ominously quiet. The hissing from George's chair had stopped.

The doctor cleared his throat, glanced significantly at Julie. "Well, yes," he said, edging closer to Marc. "I'll run along. But I want you to answer a few simple questions for me first. Is that all right?"

"Sure! Sure," Marc said feverishly. "I'll answer your questions. Only make it fast, doctor. I'm a busy man, you know."

"All right," the doctor said, taking a pencil from his pocket and carefully spreading a notebook over one knee. "I'm going to give you a list of words and I want you to give me the first response that comes into your mind. Understand?"

"Sure, doctor," Marc replied. "You say a word and I come back at you with the first thing it reminds me of. Only hurry, will you?"

"Fine." The doctor poised the pencil over the notebook. "Now this is the first word. Black."

"Future," Marc answered absently, gazing fearfully at George's chair.

"Hot," the doctor continued.

"Seat," Marc replied, sill absorbed in the chair.

"Cut."

"Throat."

"Door."

Marc glanced frightenedly at the door to the photographer's room. "Closed!" he yelled, taking advantage of the situation. "Keep the door closed!"

The doctor turned worriedly to Julie. "These are very strange responses, Mrs. Pillsworth," he said. "Frankly, I don't know what to make of them. There's some sort of anxiety complex here that's not quite clear."

"Ask half-witted questions, and you get half-witted answers."

The voice was Marc's, but still it hadn't come from Marc, though it appeared to. Obviously George was awake and entering into the spirit of things again. Marc's gaze went wild and finally stopped at the chair. It was still empty.

"What did you say?" the doctor asked politely, turning back to Marc.

"I said," the voice broke out again, "that I wish you would get the hell out of here and leave me alone. If I have to listen to you any longer, I'll probably get sick all over myself."

THE doctor stared at Marc, his face heavy with incredulity. "Now," he whispered, "he's talking without even moving his lips."

"Marc Pillsworth!" Julie put in se-

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verely. "I don't care if you are sick, you can at least be civil."

"Oh, stop your silly yapping," the voice returned. "You're no seasick remedy, yourself."

"What!" Julie's blue eyes were suddenly as hard as ice and twice as chilly. The very sight of them put icicles on Marc's spine.

"I didn't mean it!" he cried. "I mean, I didn't say it!"

"You've made your bed," Julie snapped. "Don't try to lie out of it."

It was at this juncture that the door to the photographer's room suddenly started to open. But it didn't open all the way, just a crack.

"Oh, Marc!" Toffee's happy voice trilled. "Just wait till you get a look at me in this. I'm a scandal to the jaybirds!"

Toffee, in a whimsical mood, had apparently decided to make her entrance a memorable one. Instead of swinging the door all the way open, and walking into the room as anyone else would have, she held it open just enough to allow the seductive passage of one exquisite lace-clad leg. "That," she called, "is only a promise of things to come. There ought to be music to go with this."

Julie, who had remained transfixed up to this point, suddenly came to life with a vengeance. "I'll give you something to go with it, you little tramp," she raged. "How about a fracture!" She started toward the door, but reached it too late. Already it had slammed to, and there was the sound of a key being turned in the lock. She pounded on the panel with both fists.

"Come out of there, you little sneak!" she yelled.

"Go away," Toffee's voice came back demurely. "I'm dressing."

Julie kicked the door in a fit of frustration. "You little . . . little . . . social leper!" she fumed.

"What was that!" Toffee called back, anger rising suddenly in her voice. "What did you call me?"

"Leper!" Julie screamed. "Leper! Social leper!"

"Oh," Toffee's voice was suddenly mollified. "I thought you said lecher."

"Take it either way," Julie shot back. "It won't make any difference what you are when I get hold of you!" She swung around to Marc. "Let's hear you explain that!" she demanded menacingly, pointing to the door. She moved toward him. "Stand up, Marc Pillsworth." Her voice was deceptively quiet now. "Stand up so I can knock you down. I'm going to lay you out colder than a cast iron cuspidor, you philanderer!"

"But . . . but," Marc searched for something to say against desperate odds. "What . . . what about our marriage?" he asked lamely.

"Marriage!" Julie snorted. "From now on, this isn't marriage, it's mayhem! Prop him up, doctor, and stand back!"

Marc was stunned. The transformation in Julie was almost unbelievable. He'd seen her angry before, but never this angry. Apparently the old jealousy that he'd thought cured had merely been lying dormant all the while. Now it was all the worse for having been suppressed. He got slowly to his feet, without quite realizing he was doing it. He stared at Julie in blank amazement.

"That's the good boy," Julie approved nastily. "Now just hold it." Moving swiftly to Marc's desk, she picked up a heavy ornate inkwell. Raising it over her head, she sighted a target squarely between Marc's bewildered eyes.

"Stop!" Dr. Polk was suddenly at her side, grasping her arm. "You mustn't do that, madam," he cried. "Your hus-

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band is a sick man."

"He's going to be a lot sicker when I get through with him," Julie grated. "The rip has probably been revelling around behind my back all the time."

She continued to rage. But she became so absorbed in an analytical description of Marc and all his forebears, she wasn't aware of the doctor removing the inkwell from her hand and leading her toward the door. It was unfortunate, though, that in passing George's chair her foot fell against the bottle standing beside it. For a moment the bottle teetered dangerously, then righted itself as though of its own will.

"Pick up your clumsy wedgies, tanglefoot," came George's voice. "What are you trying to do, trample the place down?"

MIRACULOUSLY, the doctor managed to pull Julie out of the office. But he didn't get the door closed in time to ward off her final shriek of outrage. It was enough to sear the paint from the walls.

"I'll see you in court, Marc Pillsworth!" she yelled.

The minute the door closed Marc leaped for George's chair. Groping for the spirit, he was rewarded with a foolish giggle.

"Stop it!" George tittered foolishly. "You tickle!"

Marc's hand finally came in contact with what seemed to have the general feel of an arm. He tugged at it. "Get up," he commanded. "We're getting out of here."

"Where we going?" George's voice asked.

"I don't know," Marc sighed wearily. "Anywhere. Come on!"

The arm rose under his hand and the bottle beside the chair suddenly darted into the air and remained there, lazily suspended. Reassured, Marc moved away, and the bottle followed. At the door to the photographer's room, he knocked. "Come on out!" he called. "They're gone. We've got to get out of here before they come back."

A key scraped in the lock, and the door inched warily open. Finally, Toffee's head appeared in the opening. "What happened?" she asked innocently.

"What a time you picked to play footsie!" Marc groaned reprovingly. "Come on, let's go."

The door opened and Toffee stepped out, a wayward vision in a black lace negligee. The garment, inspired by the peek-a-boo idea, had been translated by Toffee's lovely figure into a wide open stare. In terms of visibility, the ceiling was practically unlimited.

A low whistle generated from the vicinity of the dangling bottle at Marc's side. But Marc's own reaction was somewhat varied.

"Good night," he said. "Did you *have* to pick that? It's darned near the nakedest thing I've ever seen. It's indecent."

"Thanks," Toffee said sweetly. "I knew you'd like it. She fell into a languorous pose beside the door. "By the way, what *is* the nakedest thing you've ever seen? It might be interesting to know."

"You and your evil mind," Marc sneered. "Anyway, we haven't time for that. We've got to get out of here." He grabbed Toffee by the arm and shoved her toward the door at the rear of the office. "We can go down the fire escape, into the parking lot. Julie probably left the car there, and we'll need it."

Toffee continued to the door, opened it and passed through, holding her lacies daintily away from the floor. "I'll bet it wasn't the naked truth," she murmured reflectively.

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ON THE summit, under the roseate glow of a pink-and-lavender sunset, it was even conceivable that life could be beautiful. Scented breezes played wantonly among the pines. Everything dwelt under a spell of hushed loveliness there. That was before the blue convertible charged onto the scene in a heavy cloud of dust and dark words.

The car seemed almost in the throes of a spasm. Appearing to paw the pavement with its tires like a live and avenging thing, it sighted the nearest pine and charged it headlong. Then, at the last possible moment, it veered in the opposite direction and transferred its attack to the guard rail on the far side of the road. Rushing to the brink, it peered momentarily into the canyon below, hastily reconsidered, and reeled back to safety, its tires screaming with fright. Then, its passions apparently expended, it came to a sudden, jolting halt. Everything was quiet, except for a loud hissing sound.

Marc's voice was shaken, but nonetheless sincere. "You ever do anything like that again," he said heavily, "and I'll wring your ectoplasmic neck. Now we've got a flat."

On the other side of the car, George, now fully materialized, sighed resignedly and leaned his head back against the cushions. "I don't see why you're making such a stink about it," he said drowsily. "Why don't you just try looking at this thing from my side for a change? After all, you've got to pop off sometime. Now, just one good twist of that wheel and everything would be over in a second. Splat!"

Marc winced as George's hands slapped together. The word "splat" was too descriptive. "Wouldn't you know it?" he lamented. "Wouldn't you know that my own ghost would turn out to be a homicidal drunk? Why can't you be satisfied with just ruining my life? Isn't that enough?"

George shrugged, and reaching for the bottle at his side, helped himself to a long drink. Winking at Toffee, who was seated between him and Marc, he burped and vanished completely. "My head aches," his voice came back dispassionately from space. And almost at once soft snoring began to issue from his side of the car.

"I shouldn't wonder his head aches," Toffee mused. "He's the most loaded spirit I've ever seen." She giggled. "A spirit full of spirits."

"This," Marc said sourly, "is no time to crack bum jokes." He opened the car door and stepped out onto the road. "I'll have to change that tire."

A moment later, business-like scrapings and clankings in the rear of the car announced that Marc had set to work. Toffee leaned back and gazed absently out of the window. There wasn't much to see, only a lot of trees and bushes. And everything, to her way of thinking, was entirely too quiet. For a time she toyed with the idea of rousing George, but finally decided against it.

Then there was a faint rustling sound and Toffee glanced up to see a man scurrying out of the bushes at the side of the road. He was old, except for his eyes, which were remarkably blue and clear, though rather eclipsed by two enormous shaggy eyebrows. The rest of his face was nothing more than a tangle of yellowish grey hair, for there was no telling where his hair left off and his beard began. His clothes were in such a state of disintegration as to make them unattractive to street urchins in sub-zero weather.

"Howdy," the old fellow rasped. He locked a bony hand over the edge of the car door and peered at Toffee nearsightedly.

"Howdy," Toffee replied, glad even

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for this diversion. "What can I do for you?"

"I was wonderin'," the old fellow said with sudden shyness, "if you'd like some squeezin'?"

Toffee started visibly. "Aren't you being a little direct?" she asked coolly. "Do I look like the sort that would be interested in your squeezings?"

"They're mighty good," the old fellow went on hopefully. "I'll let you have 'em at a bargain, too."

"What!" There was real shock in Toffee's voice. "You expect me to pay you for these . . . ah . . . squeezings, as you so quaintly call them?"

"Naturally," the old man nodded. "Can't give 'em away, you know."

"I should think not!" Toffee cried. "Not to me, you couldn't. I wouldn't have them if you paid me."

"I could give you a sample," the old fellow offered. His smile was starkly toothless.

TOFFEE edged quickly away. "No, thank you," she said loftily. "In fact, I'd really rather not hear any more about it. Why don't you just take your filthy-minded squeezings and slither back into the bushes where you came from? For my part, I'll just sit here and try to forget everything you've said."

"Well, okay," the old man said sadly, "but you don't know what you're missin'."

He started to turn away, but Toffee suddenly held out a restraining hand. It was too late now. She was already intrigued. Maybe there was something here she should know about. "Wait," she said, lowering her voice. "If you can tell me in a nice way, what's so terrific about these squeezings of yours?"

"They send you clean outa this world," the old man grinned. "Just a little bit, and you won't even know what hit you."

Toffee frowned. "It seems you could be a little more modest about it," she reproved. "Aren't you married?"

"Oh, Lord, yes," the old man sighed wearily.

"Doesn't your wife mind you running around, doing all this squeezing?"

"Naw. The old lady helps me."

"What!" Toffee looked horrified. "You mean she's mixed up in this squeezing business too!"

"Sure. Her and the whole family."

"Oh, my gosh!" Toffee moaned. "This is too much. I suppose it shows a nice enterprising spirit on the part of you and your family, but isn't it all a little hard to get used to?"

The old man shook his head. "Don't know why it should be," he mused. "You city people sure do get some strange notions in your heads."

"We don't hold a candle to you country people," Toffee retorted. "But I suppose, being up here alone and all, squeezings do begin to take on a certain importance after a while."

"That's right," the old man agreed. "They're mighty comfortin' on a cold night. Mighty nice when everyone's scrouged up around the fire."

"Scrouged up?" Toffee asked timidly. "You mean you have to be scrouged up for these squeezings?"

Marc suddenly appeared at the opposite window, wiping his hands on a rag with an air of finality. He regarded the old man mildly. "What can I do for you, old timer?" he asked.

"For heaven's sake!" Toffee cried imploringly. "Don't ask him!"

"What?" Marc stared at her questioningly.

"The old boy's as daffy as a snowball in July," Toffee whispered. "He's wild on the idea of going around squeezing people. He claims it's more darned

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fun. Says he has some sort of new technique or something where people get all scrouged up, whatever that means. He started harping about it the minute he got his nose out of those bushes. It's the worst thing I've ever listened to."

"I saw you folks stopped down here," the old man put in, "and I thought you might like some real mountain squeezin's. How about it, mister?"

"You see!" Toffee cried. "He's off on it again. Him and his squeezings! It's likely that if I have to listen to any more about either of them I'll be a gibbering idiot."

The old man looked distressed. "I think there's somethin' serious wrong with that gal," he told Marc regretfully. "I didn't want to tell her to her face, but she's too excitable. She got all skitterish just because I tried . . ."

"And who wouldn't get skitterish," Toffee snapped, "with old gophers leering out of the bushes, trying to squeeze them? It's enough to unbalance anyone."

"I didn't try to squeeze you, lady," the old man retorted with unexpected heat. "And I didn't leer neither."

Anger suddenly flared in Toffee's green eyes. "Don't you try to deny it, you old hayseed!" she yelled. "I remember every word you said."

MARC rushed into the breach. "Stop this wrangling," he commanded. "Let's get to the bottom of this thing." He turned to the old man. "Did you or did you not try to . . . ah . . . squeeze this young lady?"

"At my age?" the old man asked forlornly. "What do you think? I just came down here to sell you folks some corn squeezin's. I didn't know it was goin' to make all this trouble. Now I just want to forget the whole thing and go away. I think I'll go into the hog business."

"Corn squeezings?" Marc asked. "What's that?"

"It's a kind of likker," the old man said uninterestedly, as though it really didn't matter any more. "I make it myself. I got a still up yonder on the mountain. Right now I'm goin' up there and lay into the damn thing with a sledge hammer."

"Oh," Toffee breathed embarrassedly. "So that's all it was!" She reached a hand to Marc's sleeve. "Maybe we ought to buy some of his . . ." she shied away from the word, "that stuff. Just to make it up to him. It seems the least we can do."

Marc nodded and turned to the old man. "Don't take it so hard, old timer," he said sympathetically. "You just made a sale the hard way."

It was some time before Marc and Toffee emerged from the woods and started down the hill toward the car. Leaving the shadows of the great pines, they stepped into a path of shimmering bright moonlight. Over one shoulder, Marc carried an old-fashioned jug, and his face had rather a wooden look about it, though it was set in a blissful smile. Toffee moved loose-jointedly along at his side, softly singing a song about a girl named Lil who had suffered a rather devastating fall from grace at a shockingly early age. They moved lightly and silently down the hillside like a pair of enchanted shadows. It was just as they were approaching the car that Marc suddenly stopped and grasped Toffee's arm.

"You hear voices?" he whispered thickly.

Toffee leaned forward in a listening attitude. "I think so," she said, "but they may be in my head." She leaned forward again, and after a moment, nodded vigorously. A voice that sounded like a bucksaw drawn across a block

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of cement was coming from somewhere on the other side of the car.

"I looked everywhere, Marge," it said, "but I ain't seen nothin'."

"But I *hear* it," a feminine voice replied. "It sounded like it's somewhere inside the car."

The woman's voice was the perfect mate to the one that had spoken first; it was as husky as an acre of Iowa corn.

"It's the most gruesome thing I've ever heard," the first voice continued. "What'll we do?"

"Look again. Whatever it is, it must be sufferin' somethin' awful."

The golden beam of a flashlight suddenly stretched out over the hood of the car, then moved back swiftly toward the interior. Marc started forward. "Company," he murmured happily. Then he called out; "Hello, there!"

Two startled faces instantly appeared over the top of the car. They were quite distinct in the bright moonlight. One was large and hard looking, like a product of Bethlehem Steel. The other was small, but all the worse for hard wear. Surrounded by a mop of gauzy blond hair, its makeup had been ladled on by a hand that was more lavish than loving. The owner of the large, hard head was the first to speak.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"From heaven," Marc answered inanely. "That's what my folks said."

"Holy smoke!" the man said, turning to his companion. "Marge! Look at that dame! She aint got nothin' on but a bunch of holes and a lot of skin!"

"Watch your temperature, Pete," Marge replied menacingly. "Remember what happened when I caught you with that blonde in Des Moines?"

PETE was immediately subdued. He fastened his eyes on Marc and carefully kept them there. By this time Marc and Toffee had reached the car and were moving toward the newcomers. The pair with the flashlight seemed to regard them with suspicion.

"You hillbillies?" the man named Pete asked. It was the forlorn conversational effort of a subnormal personality.

"Hah!" It was Marge who spoke up. "Just look at that dame, Pete. Does she make you think of hillbillies?"

"She makes me think of a lot of things," Pete answered promptly.

"Look, sister," Marge said, turning to Toffee. "You better clear outa here. You and me, we're goin' to tangle if you don't."

"Just because the boy shows a little good taste?" Toffee asked archly.

"He's got taste," Marge retorted, "like a mouth full of quinine."

"That must be why he got mixed up with you," Toffee said sweetly. "I understand there are things written on washroom walls about dames like you."

Marge made a small snarling noise, then lunged toward Toffee. "Oh, what a fresh babe!" she screamed. "I oughta belt you one. We'll just see how smart you are. I'll rip that sleezy dress right offa your back!"

Toffee ducked quickly behind Marc. "You rip off this dress," she giggled, "and you'll see a whale of a lot more than how smart I am."

That one stopped Marge cold. A naked redhead was bound to create more of a disturbance in Pete's life than just a fresh one dressed in lace. She was forced to content herself with only a murderous glare, but she put her all into it.

Marc, who had been watching these developments with an air of detached amusement, stepped forward, removing Toffee's protection. "You're all upset," he said to Marge, lowering the jug from his shoulder. "Have some squeez-

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in's."

"Say," Marge drawled in a voice that was not altogether displeased, "are you tryin' to make a pass at me?"

"It's liquor," Marc answered amiably. "It hits the spot."

"Oh." Marge accepted the jug, tilted it and took a long, accomplished swallow. "Wow!" she gasped. "That stuff not only hits the spot, mister, it completely demolishes it. I bet my breath is radioactive."

Marc took the jug from her and turned it over to Pete, who drank from it deeply, without so much as a tremor. When the jug was returned, Marc put it on the ground. "Say," he said, "you two were looking for something when we came along. Can we help? What was it?"

"The owner of this here car," Pete said. "We can hear him snorin' in there, but I'm damned if we can find him."

"I told you," Marge put in argumentatively. "That ain't nothin' human that's makin' that noise. Leastways, it ain't nothin' that would own a car."

"You're nuts," Pete retorted. "That's somebody sleepin' in there."

For a moment they paused and listened. George's snoring was swiftly building to a stirring crescendo. It sounded like a sawmill in mid-season.

"Oh, that!" Marc laughed. "That's George. He's my . . . uh . . . my dog. I keep him locked in the back."

"You mean this here is yore car?" Pete asked.

"Sure," Marc patted the car fondly. "All mine."

Pete glanced at Marge. "Shall we do it?"

"Yeah," Marge said, helping herself to the jug. "We ain't got all night."

MARC and Toffee watched interestedly as Pete wedged an immense hand into his coat pocket and set it into a complicated series of fumbling motions. Presently, the hand seemed to locate what it was searching for and emerged once more into the bright moon light. It was holding a gun.

"Put up your hands," Pete growled, "before I blow your heads off." Then he glanced at Marge uncertainly. "Is that right?" he asked.

The blonde nodded. "You could put more guts into it, maybe, but it'll do in this case."

Pete nodded with satisfaction and turned back to Marc. "Will you give me the keys to this here car, please?" he asked politely. "Me and Marge, here, are goin' to steal it, if it's all the same to you."

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" Marge snorted disgustedly. "Now you've went and messed it all up. Don't be so polite. How many times do I have to tell you? And don't ever say please. Tell 'em to hand over the keys and no funny business. Make it sound professional. When you're snatchin' a valuable article like a car, the victim's entitled to a first class hold-up with plenty of rough talk. Please, he says! What're people gonna think?"

Pete grinned at Marc apologetically. "Marge is coachin' me," he said. "She's learnin' me the profession. Only I'm kinda dumb. I always louse up."

"Oh, I don't know," Toffee put in kindly. "I don't think you were so bad. I think a bit of politeness in a stick up lends a refreshing new note. It's original."

"See, Marge!" Pete said triumphantly. "Did you hear? I'm original."

"You're the original dope," Marge snapped. "I don't care what she says, we're stickin' to standard methods. If they were good enough for my old lady, they're good enough for me. Now get them keys, and let's blow."

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For a moment Pete looked crestfallen. "Sometimes," he murmured, "I wish I was just a juvenile delinquent again." Then, with a sigh, he jammed the gun into Marc's ribs. "Hand over them keys, buddy," he snarled. "And no funny business, see?"

Marc turned unconcernedly to Marge. "I like the other way better too," he said. "It's got more class."

"Who's runnin' this stick-up?" Marge said angrily. "Do I tell you your business? This is what I get for messin' with amateurs."

"Aw, Marge," Pete pleaded. "You ought'n to talk like that. I'm tryin' hard to do like you tell me."

"Sure," Toffee broke in. "Anyone can see he's sincere, and that's the important thing. Anyone who's sincere is bound to get ahead. You'll be proud of Pete someday. He may get to Sing Sing before you do, yourself."

"You stay out of this," Marge rasped, nearly at the end of her rope. "He's my boy friend, and I'll train him my way."

"What do you want the car for?" Marc asked, brushing Pete's gun gently away from his side. "Do you really need it, or are you just practicing?"

"We need the thing," Marge said wearily, tears of bitter humiliation beginning to well in her eyes. "We were makin' a getaway, our heap broke down about a mile back. We gotta get outa here, mister. Honest. Now, won't you please cooperate and let Pete stick you up?"

"Sure," Marc said agreeably. "Stick me up, Pete."

"What about us?" Toffee asked suddenly. "We need the car too."

"Yeah," Pete said, gesturing at Marge with his gun. "What about them?"

Marge threw her hand up in a gesture of despair. "That rips it!" she wailed. "I don't care what about anything anymore. You're all nuts . . . or drunk . . . or both." She sat down heavily on the running board and cupped her chin dejectedly in her hands. "Things have sure gone all to hell!"

A thoughtful silence fell over the little group for a time. Marc was the first to speak. "I tell you what," he said brightly. "We'll all go together. Toffee and I were only looking for a place to stay. You two come along with us, and when we find a place we like, you can stick us up all over again and steal the car. How's that?"

Pete smiled hopefully at Marge. "Yeah, Marge," he said. "That's fair, ain't it? And on the way you could coach me some more so's I'll do it right, the way you want it. I'll really stick 'em up this time, too. I'll scare hell outa 'em."

"Oh, all right," Marge said resignedly. "But if I wake up in a padded cell tomorrow, I ain't even goin' to ask how I got there."

Silently, the little party arranged itself in the car. Marge followed Pete into the back seat, scowling sullenly. Hugging the jug to her, Toffee slid across the front seat to make room for Marc behind the wheel. As she did so, the snoring, that had grown in intensity, was suddenly interrupted by a loud snort.

"If that was my dog," Marge said bitterly, "I'd strangle the beast."

WHEN Marc turned off the ignition, the convertible seemed to sigh with relief . . . so did the occupants of the back seat. Otherwise, everything was quiet. George's snoring had stopped completely some minutes before.

"Oh, Moses!" Marge murmured faintly. "Now, when they say death rides the highways, I'll know who

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they're talkin' about." She tugged at Pete's sleeve. "And did you see that jug floatin' around up there all by itself?"

"You're just excited, Marge," Pete told her soothingly. "You didn't see nothin' like that." He turned to Marc pleadingly. "She didn't see no jug floatin' around up there, did she, mister?"

But Marc didn't answer. He and Toffee were concerned with a light glowing through the pines just a few yards away from the road. Finally, Marc opened the door and got out of the car.

"I can't tell what it is," he said, "but I'll see if they can put us up for the night." He moved away in the direction of the glowing light.

It was several minutes later when Marc, followed by a balding little relic of a day gone by, retraced his steps through the open door and stepped onto the antiquated veranda of Sunnygarden Lodge . . . "A Haven For The Weary."

"You needn't come along," he said uneasily to the little man. "My friends are waiting in the car. I can get them myself."

"Oh, but I insist!" the little fellow piped in a managerial voice. "I always greet each and every guest of Sunnygarden Lodge personally. I just wouldn't forgive myself if they came in without a personal welcome."

Marc hurried down the steps as though trying to lose the little manager. "My friends won't mind if you don't welcome them," he said. "They won't care at all. In fact, I'm sure they'd rather you wouldn't bother."

"Tut, tut!" The manager clung doggedly to Marc's side. "I like to know my guests. I take it as a sort of responsibility. As a rule, my guests are rather elderly and come regularly for the quiet. I like to make sure that any newcomers are . . . uh . . . well, compatible. Courtesy of the house, you know."

Reaching the drive, Marc started energetically down its center, hoping the manager would tire of the pace and drop out. But falling into a sort of jittery dog-trot, the fellow tagged persistently along. It was just as they were rounding the first curve by the corner of the lodge that the blast of the horn suddenly shattered the stillness, and the blue convertible bounded into sight. Headlight beams searched wildly through the pines for a second, then fell to the graveled drive and stabbed forward.

Marc and the manager stood transfixed as the car bore down upon them. Then, just in time, Marc reached out, hugged the little man to him, and leaped to the safety of the lawn. The car raced past in a flash, but not so fast that it did not disclose several disconcerting facts, not the least of which was the empty space in the driver's seat. Apparently driverless, the car streaked by, the wail of its horn horribly augmented by terrified shrieks from the back seat. In startling contrast to all this, Toffee leaned gaily out of the window, opposite the wheel, and blew Marc a hurried kiss. Coming abreast of the veranda a split second later, the car came to a sudden, jarring stop, spitting gravel to the winds like rice at a wedding. A final blast from the horn announced the completion of these demented operations, and everything suddenly fell into a deep, throbbing silence.

"Oh, my heavens!" the little manager gasped. "Oh!"

"I . . . I can't imagine what happened," Marc faltered lamely.

"I don't think my guests will like this," the manager said reprovingly.

Together, Marc and the manager

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made their way back to the veranda. The door, on Toffee's side of the car, was just starting to open, and Marc made a dash for it. Arriving just as Toffee placed the first slender foot on the drive, he reached inside the car, drew out a plaid lap robe and draped it over her like a piece of wet wash.

"Hey!" Toffee cried. "What's the big idea?"

MARC turned and smiled wanly at the manager who was now standing on the lodge steps. Looking back at Toffee, his smile faded. "I wanted to be sure you wouldn't catch cold," he hissed. "Now, keep it on."

Marge's voice sounded weakly behind them. "Outa my way," she whimpered, fairly crawling from the car. Like the survivor of the wreck, she stumbled forward a few steps and turned baleful eyes toward the manager. "Shove a stretcher under me, pops," she gasped. "I think I'm going to pass out."

The words of welcome that had been determinedly forming on the manager's lips froze there like an epitaph in granite. Then they vanished altogether at the sudden appearance of Pete. The big man lumbered blindly out of the car, his momentum carrying him half up to the steps of the lodge. Then he whirled abruptly, sat down, and put his head in his hands.

"It ain't worth it," he mourned. "I'm going straight."

"Aren't you going to steal the car?" Toffee asked disappointedly.

Marge looked up ruefully. "Wild horses couldn't drag me back into that car," she said.

Meanwhile, Marc, staring inside the car, had stiffened in an attitude of panic-stricken fascination. The jug, that had been resting on the seat, had suddenly jumped into the air and was floating lightly out, through the opposite door. It wasn't until it had jauntily traversed the entire front half of the car and started to emerge around the edge of the right fender that the horrible possibilities of the situation suddenly bore down on Marc and pressed him into action. Leaping forward, he grasped the jug arond the base and tugged at it. Hearing a gasp behind him, he glanced back over his shoulder and discovered that everyone, and especially the manager, was watching him with consuming interest. He grinned sheepishly and turned back to the matter of the jug.

With a defiant gurgle the jug immediately started to put up a fight. Shooting out of his hands like a live thing, it darted coyly behind him. He whirled and caught hold of it, just as it started to slip out of reach.

"Give me that thing," he rasped.

"You're always so greedy," George's voice came back. "If you want a drink so bad, why don't you just ask for it like a gentleman?"

"Good heavens!" the manager exclaimed from the steps. "Is he actually arguing with that thing?"

Marc wrenched the jug free and clutched it firmly to his side. " I lost my balance," he said self-consciously. "Gravel's slippery."

"Is it?" the manager asked coolly. He cleared his throat with an effort. "Well, if we're all ready, we'll go inside, shall we?" He glanced back at Marc disapprovingly. "Our guests," he added warningly, "do very little drinking here."

MARC awoke and instantly regretted it. Horrible memories of the previous day's events trampled each other in a rush for his attention. His head ached and his feet felt oddly heavy and immovable. He groaned and propped him-

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self forward with his hands, then he groaned again. No wonder his feet felt heavy. Toffee was sitting on his ankles.

"I don't know how just one man can look so awful," she said lightly. "I should think it would take at least two . . . maybe three."

"What're you doing here?" Marc asked thickly. "Go 'way."

"And a happy good morning to you, too." Toffee slid quickly toward him and brushed cool lips across his forehead. "You scare me," she laughed. Then, suddenly quitting him, she moved across the room to consider herself critically in the bureau mirror. "I don't know why you went to the trouble of getting me a room of my own," she murmured, running her fingers lightly through her hair. "You know very well I wouldn't get any use of it. I can stay materialized only when I'm projected through your consciousness. When you go to sleep, I have to return to your subconscious until you wake up."

"Haven't you ever heard of decency?" Marc asked.

Toffee nodded. "I've heard talk of it. But nothing interesting."

Marc shook his head sadly. "Where are George and those two criminal types we picked up last night?"

"How should I know?" Toffee shrugged. "Probably downstairs, stuffing themselves at your expense. That's what I'd be doing. It's nearly ten o'clock."

"Holy smoke!" Marc cried. "Is it that late? You mean those maniacs are probably running around loose down there?" He swung his long legs out over the edge of the bed. "Get out of here so I can dress."

Toffee started slowly toward the door. "Puritan," she said chidingly.

Marc looked up, startled. In daylight, in the lace dress, Toffee's exquisite body seemed merely to be passing through a lightly shaded bower, completely unclothed. Clutching a sheet to him, he jumped up, pulled a scarf from a nearby table and threw it to her. "Here!" he called. "Put that on!"

Catching the scarf, Toffee held it out full length. "It's not big enough to do much good, is it?" she asked innocently.

"Use it strategically!" Marc sighed, "where it will do the most good."

Draping the scarf lightly over her shoulders, Toffee left the room.

ONLY minutes later, still needing a shave, Marc joined Toffee in the hallway. Together, they hurried downstairs and made their way directly to the dining room. Toffee had guessed right. Across the room, at a corner table, were George, Marge and Pete. Of the three, George was the only one facing in their direction and he was so busy talking he didn't notice them.

George had done a good job of materializing . . . except for one little detail. His trouser legs terminated in two gaping holes. One leg crossed jauntily over the other, he was nonexistent from the ankles down. The explanation for this oversight probably lay in the jug nestled next to the leg of his chair.

In a chair that was almost back-to-back with George's, a little white-haired lady was nearly twisting her frail neck double in an effort to have a better view of George's footless legs. Passing a trembling hand over her eyes, she shuddered with horror and finally turned away. Across the table from her, her elderly male companion cast her a questioning glance, but she ignored it and stared determinedly out the window. Her thin, colorless lips were silently forming the words: "I won't. I won't. I *won't* look again!"

It was apparent at a glance that the entire clientele of Sunnygarden Lodge

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hovered dangerously close to the grave. Wheel chairs, crutches, and ear aids were much in evidence in the hushed funereal atmosphere of the dining room that was only occasionally interrupted by the inadvertent clatter of a slipping denture. In contrast, however, a lively, greying woman in a comic-opera gypsy costume moved from table to table, at the far end of the room, with hateful persistence, like a bee searching for honey in a cluster of toadstools.

Toffee nudged Marc and pointed to the woman. "What's that?" she asked.

"A fortune teller," Marc said absently. "They always have them in dumps like this. They're considered quaint by the older set. She generalizes about your future at a buck a throw."

He started across the room, and Toffee followed. As they drew near the table in the corner, George suddenly glanced up for the first time and saw them. Blanching, he hurriedly handed Pete a piece of paper, then got quickly up from his chair and started away. By the time Marc and Toffee reached the table, he had passed behind a dusty potted palm and melted away like a cloud of smoke in a heavy gale.

Marge started as she looked up and saw Marc standing beside her. "How did you get *there*?" she asked. Her hand, that had been stretched out toward a dark object lying opposite her, on the table, darted back guiltily. Marc glanced down and recognized his own wallet.

"How did that get here?" he asked.

"You left it just now," Marge said confusedly. "I thought I'd better look after it while you were away."

Marc picked up the wallet and opened it. Two hundred dollars in bills were missing, but three hundred dollars and several checks remained. Obviously, George had lifted the wallet sometime during the night. But what could he possibly find to do with two hundred dollars in a place like Sunnygarden Lodge? Marc couldn't imagine. The matter would have to wait until George decided to reappear again. Helping Toffee into a chair, Marc seated himself in the place that had been George's.

RESTING her elbows on the table, Toffee cupped her chin demurely in her hand and leveled an accusing gaze on Marge. "Having a little larceny for breakfast, dear?" she asked.

"Don't get smart," Marge mumbled. "I'm goin' straight."

"To where?"

"Say! I oughta chop you off at the pockets for a crack like that. You ain't no angel yourself. Why, if you ever showed up around headquarters in that dress you're wearin', they'd throw the book at you."

"Which book is that?" Toffee asked with genuine interest.

"Huh?" Marge said.

"The book they're going to throw at me. Which one is it?"

"Yeah, Marge," Pete put in from across the table. "Which book is that?"

"How should I know which book!" Marge cried with sudden confusion. "Any one that's handy, I suppose. I don't care if they throw the whole library at her. I wish they would."

"Now," Toffee said thoughtfully, "if this book was 'Forever Amber' . . ."

"Skip it!" Marge cried distractedly. "For the love of heaven, skip it, can't you? I'm sorry I brought it up."

"You should be," Toffee said sternly. "Besides, flinging books about seems a very loose way of upholding the law. I don't think you know what you're talking about."

Marge winced, completely demoral-

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ized. Across the table, Pete dug an affable elbow into Marc's ribs.

"You're plenty smart, Mr. Pillsworth," he said. "That business about the note is the nuts." He tapped his coat pocket. "It leaves Marge and me in the clear. Of course, I think the whole deal is kinda loopy, but if that's the way you want it. . . ." He shrugged his beefy shoulders significantly.

For a moment Marc was completely mystified . . . but only for a moment. Plainly, Pete was confusing him with George. The best thing, in that case, was probably just to string along with the gag and find out what was going on . . . what kind of a "deal" George had made.

"Let's see the note," he said, holding out his hand.

"What for?" Pete wanted to know. "You give it to me to keep."

"I want to make a correction," Marc said quickly.

A crafty look came into Pete's eyes. "Say, you ain't tryin' to back out, are you? You said I wasn't to let you, if you did. Remember?"

Things, Marc could see, were going to take a bit of doing. Perhaps a little firmness. . . . "Give me that note," he ordered.

"In front of her?" Pete nodded toward Toffee. "You wouldn't want her to know about it. It'd shock her somethin' awful. You wanted this all secret."

Marc decided to drop the matter. Anything that would shock Toffee's rawhide sensitivities was better left in the dim regions of Pete's pocket . . . for the time being, anyway. Uneasy thoughts of blackmail coursed quietly through his mind.

Pushing her chair back, Marge got to her feet. "Come on, Pete," she said. "Let's get outa here and get some fresh air."

"You ain't finished breakfast yet," Pete reminded her.

"All of a sudden I got sour stomach." She glanced meaningfully at Toffee.

Together, the two of them left the table and moved across the dining room, to the door leading onto the veranda. Marc stared worriedly after them.

"Don't look so glum," Toffee said gently, reaching out to pat his hand. "You still love me, you know, no matter what happens."

"I don't deserve you," Marc said sadly. "I've never been that mean."

It was then that he caught sight of the jug. It had begun to behave very strangely in the last few seconds. Surreptitiously, it was inching away from his chair like a footless penguin.

"So you're back, are you?" Marc said addressing the ambling jug.

The jug came to a guilty halt. "Uh-huh," George's voice said quietly.

"What have you been up to behind my back? What's this deal with Pete?"

"Nothing . . . much."

"You sit down," Marc commanded irritably, "and materialize. I want to tell you what I think of you right to your treacherous face."

THE jug swooped over to the chair that Pete had just left and settled on the floor. The chair moved briefly out from the table, then back again. Slowly, George came into view, looking very sheepish. That no one besides Marc and Toffee seemed to notice this singular occurrence was probably due to the failing eyesight of the other guests of Sunnygarden Lodge.

Marc leveled a tense finger at George's nose. His lips parted angrily, but he didn't speak. An alien hand had suddenly closed over his own. He looked up to find the decrepit gypsy standing beside him. She was bent over his hand, staring at it myopically.

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"You," she said in heavy, theatrical tones, "are destined to live a long and happy life. It is written in your hand."

Toffee looked on these proceedings with high disapproval. "You quit holding his hand, you old moll," she put in heatedly, "or your life won't be worth living."

The woman looked up in alarm. "Alright, dearie," she said, dropping Marc's hand. "No harm done." She tottered briskly away from the table.

Not to be deterred by this interruption, Marc leveled his finger back at George's nose. "Now, listen, you . . ." he began. But there he stopped.

A strange expression had come into George's face and he was beginning to look a little ill. He glanced uneasily around the room, then swallowed . . . hard. For a moment he looked like he was going to speak, but all of a sudden there was a sharp popping sound, like a blown fuse, and he instantly vanished. In the same moment, the jug beside his chair began to tremble violently, then, astonishingly, leaped about a foot into the air, as though seized with a fit of anger. It lingered there, undecidedly suspended for a moment, then suddenly crashed to the floor, sending shattered crockery and liquid fanning out in a messy arc. Marc and Toffee stared at the wreckage as the little white-haired lady, who had found George's feet so fascinating, suddenly started from her chair.

"I can't stand it another minute!" she whimpered. "I must see! I *must*!" And whirling around to face Marc she stared at him wretchedly for an intensely silent moment. Then, with a quick movement, she reached quickly down beneath the table and started tugging at the legs of his trousers.

Marc was instantly on his feet. "Lady!" he yelped in surprise. "What a thing to do! Let go of my pants!"

"Yes," Toffee put in excitedly, rising from her chair. "You should have given up ideas like that long ago!"

The little woman hesitated in her activities, seeming to realize for the first time what she was doing. And, clearly, it shocked her even more than Marc or Toffee. With an agonized upward glance at Marc, she made an unintelligible sound, turned chalk white and slumped to the floor in a dead faint.

At this point the situation might have straightened itself out. It might have, that is, if the woman had only thought to release her hold on Marc's trouser legs. But she hadn't. Falling back, she dragged Marc's balance after her. Clawing the air in a sort of breast stroke, Marc crashed to the floor, and sprawled out full length.

At this, the woman's male companion, who had been watching these procedings through a nearsighted haze, shot from his chair like an avenging angel. "He attacked my wife!" the little man screamed. "The fiend! I seen him! He attacked my old lady!"

THE quiet atmosphere in the dining room suddenly gave way to riot. The patrons of the lodge were magically transformed into a league of formidable warriors . . . no longer the slowly disintegrating remnants that they had first appeared to be. Summoning hidden vigor, from heaven only knew what source, they rose as a body and swarmed toward the scene of outrage. One of their number had been attacked and they were plainly not to be found wanting. Crutches, ear trumpets and miscellaneous silverware were instantly pressed into service in lieu of weapons. One old gentleman, racing his wheelchair at break-neck speed, hurled himself into the fray with all the proud spirit of a knight astride a charger. Other ancient enlistees, in their near-

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sightedness, promptly engaged each other in ferocious battle, no questions asked. Crockery flew in all directions and crashed unheeded against the walls. The orderly dining room was reduced to a raging ruin in only a matter of seconds.

At the first signs of hostilities, Toffee had jumped to Marc's defense. It was her thought that the whole thing could be prevented with a few pertinent words of explanation. But no sooner had she opened her mouth than the arm rest of a crutch caught her rudely under the chin and pinned her against the wall, silent and helpless. Her captor was a wild-eyed little lady in subdued lavender.

"Hussy!" the little woman screamed. "Runnin' around with fiends! You're just as bad as the company you keep. Don't you dast open your painted mouth to me!"

Somehow, Marc, by this time, had managed to stagger to his feet. Seeing Toffee's predicament, he started toward her, but was cut off by his howling tormentors. Wildly, he swung about in the opposite direction. Then he stopped short. For an instant his gaze had swept over the open door leading onto the veranda. Coming up the steps, and losing no time about it, were Julie and Dr. Polk.

Marc whirled back toward the door. "Julie" he screamed.

Julie glanced frightenedly toward the scene of chaos. But Marc never saw her face, for at that same moment a warming dish, complete with heavy metal cover, came down thunderously over his head. Poached eggs were streaming into his eyes as he pitched toward the floor, but he wasn't aware of them. Everything had already gone pitch black.

The little lady in lavender started forward a bit as the crutch gave under her hand and jolted against the wall. She stared quizzically at the wall. Then, dropping the crutch, she removed her glasses and wiped them vigorously with a delicate lace handkerchief. Replacing the glasses carefully, she stared at the wall again.

"Well, I'll be blessed," she murmured. "I could have sworn I had that little harpy all the time."

Toffee had vanished into thin air.

A TINY bubble of awareness rose through the blackness of Marc's mind, reached the surface and exploded with a flash of light. It was immediately followed by another . . . then two . . . and three . . . and a score. Marc stirred and opened his eyes. His vision was pulsing and dim. Objects leaped into view, then disappeared. A chair, a table, a door, a window with the blind mostly drawn. His hands fell against softness and he knew he was lying on a bed. He rolled over. The motion must have had a clearing effect on his head, for the objects were suddenly more distinct and remained in focus longer. A seated figure swam into view very close by. For a moment it hovered over him, then faded, vanished, reappeared and remained. It was Dr. Polk.

The doctor's precise features arranged themselves into a sparse smile. "Well, my boy," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"I . . . I don't know," Marc faltered. "How did you find me here?"

"We gave the police the license number on your car as soon as you ran off yesterday," the doctor answered. "They didn't have much trouble locating you." He smiled sadly. "You've been a rather naughty boy. They tell me you've taken to beating old ladies."

"No," Marc murmured. "A mistake . . . it was a mistake."

"Yes, yes," the doctor patronized.

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"But we must face things as they really are, my boy. It's the only way out, you know. Something has upset you badly, but everything can be set right again if we can get to the root of the trouble. You must be pronounced well again, you know, if you're to go to court against Mrs. Pillsworth. We'll have to re-establish your legal status."

"What!" Marc didn't know where the strength came from but he was suddenly sitting up. "Get out of here! I'll stay nutty the rest of my life if that's the way the wind is blowing." He fell back, exhausted, but he was beginning to feel better. Stronger, anyway.

"Now, you must be reasonable," the doctor went on, undisturbed. "You wouldn't want to be put away in an institution, would you?"

Marc shook his head. It was the truth; he wouldn't.

"Then you must help me to help you. First of all, I want you to go back in memory to your childhood, and tell me anything, everything that comes to mind. Just close your eyes and think back. Start with your earliest memory."

Marc glared at the doctor for a moment, then resignedly closed his eyes. There was a long period of silence. Finally, he said, "The first I remember is the night I was born."

"What!" the doctor's voice was excited.

"Yes. I recall that someone gave me a pair of soft blue booties."

"Yes, go on!"

"I used them," Marc said flatly, "to beat the doctor's brains out." He opened his eyes and boosted himself forward. "How's that for a memory?"

But the doctor wasn't listening. In fact, he wasn't even looking at Marc. Instead, his gaze was fastened in horrified wonder on the bureau across the room. A shudder crept through his thin body, and he turned away, one slender hand pressed firmly to his eyes.

The reason for the doctor's distress was instantly apparent; Toffee had materialized. Seated pertly atop the bureau, one perfect leg crossed seductively over the other, she was truly a vision from another world. There was something statuesque and unnatural in her pose. But when Marc looked at her, she came momentarily to life. Quickly, she raised one tapering finger to her lips, then shook her head. That was all. Immediately, she resumed the mannikin pose and held it rigidly. Marc nodded and slumped back on the bed.

"Well, doc," he said brightly, "what do you think of my childhood?"

THE doctor drew his hand away from his eyes and stared at Marc stupidly. "Your childhood?" he asked bemusedly. "I . . . I . . . think . . ." He glanced quickly over his shoulder at the bureau and shuddered again. "Tell . . . tell me," he faltered. "What do you see on that bureau over there?"

With elaborate deliberation, Marc raised himself and squinted at the bureau. "A Gideon bible," he said pleasantly. "That's all I see."

The doctor's face turned ash grey. "Been working too hard," he muttered. "Got to . . . to . . . to take a rest." He turned misery-ridden eyes on Marc. "You'll have to excuse me. We will continue . . . later . . . maybe."

He got unsteadily to his feet and moved slowly toward the door. Reaching it, he stretched his hand toward the knob, then withdrew it. Clearly, the good doctor was struggling against some inner conflict. Suddenly, with a determined lift of his chin, he turned and gazed squarely at the bureau. It was a grave mistake.

It wasn't so much that Toffee met

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the doctor's gaze unblinkingly. The real damage was done when she smiled and winked at him. That was too much. With a cry of purest despair, the doctor pivoted, threw open the door and bolted into the hall. A second later his footsteps echoed on the stairs with machinegun rapidity.

Marc swung himself off the bed and impulsively crossed to Toffee and kissed her on the cheek. "You were wonderful," he said. "You certainly stewed his prunes."

Toffee leaned back and giggled. "You only say that," she murmured, "just because I'm gorgeous. I wonder if Julie ever found . . ."

"Julie!" Marc's eyes were panic-stricken.

Perhaps Julie was a bit high tempered at times, but she was still his wife. It seemed, now, that he had been caught in a raging flood of madness and Julie was the rock of reality to which he must cling at all costs. Whirling away from Toffee, he raced toward the door.

When Marc reached the foyer of the lodge, he was surprised to find it completely deserted, except for the little manager. Astonishingly, at the sight of Marc, the fellow clasped his hands ecstatically before him and ran to meet him. "Oh, Mr. Pillsworth!" he cried. "You don't know what you've done! You just simply don't *know!* You've absolutely rejuvenated my guests with that little riot of yours. They all said they didn't know when they felt so young. They've all gone out in the woods for a picnic . . . with beer! They took up a collection for the damage in the dining room, and . . ."

Marc wasn't listening. "Where's my wife?" he asked. "Where's Julie?"

"The pretty blonde young lady?" the manager asked.

"Yes, yes. Where is she?"

"Out on the veranda, I believe. Down at the far end, around the corner. Poor dear, she was crying terribly when she went out."

Marc turned and darted for the door. Then he stopped abruptly. A large hand had fallen over his arm and was holding him back. He looked up to see Pete standing beside him.

"Let go," he said impatiently, "I've got to find my . . ."

"Never mind," Pete said. "You just come along with me. Let's get it over with, huh? Marge and me, we want to get outa here."

"Get what over with? What are you talking about?"

"You know. Our deal."

"What deal? Say, what is this all about, anyway?"

"You know. The deal you said I wasn't to let you back out on. Remember?"

SUBSEQUENT development had completely banished the scene at the breakfast table from Marc's mind. "No. I don't remember any deal." He tried to pull away, but the big man held him firmly.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Pillsworth. Remember at breakfast when you told me how you come up here to commit suicide 'cause your wife is leavin' you? Only you didn't have the nerve? Remember how you give me two C's to bump you off? And I wasn't to let you back out no matter what you said? And the note you give me, sayin' how you was knockin' yourself off over a busted heart, so's Marge and me, we'd be in the clear on doin' the job? Remember?"

"I've been framed," Marc said desperately, recalling the note he'd seen George give to Pete. "That was George you made the deal with. He wants me out of the way. You weren't talking to me. You were talking to George!"

Pete started to laugh. "That's pretty

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funny, Mr. Pillsworth!" he roared. "George, the talkin' dog, done it, eh? That's real good. I'll have to tell Marge." His hand moved close to Marc's side. It was holding a gun. "You paid me for a job, Mr. Pillsworth, and you got a job comin'. It wouldn't be honest otherwise. And I ain't goin' to let you talk me outa it, neither. Aren't you glad?" He gave the gun an extra shove. "I'd rather not do it right here. Let's go outside. Whaddaya say?"

As Pete shoved him gently but firmly toward the door, Marc peered frantically around the room. "George!" he called. "George! Oh, George, for the love of Mike!"

Behind him, Pete's laugh boomed out in a salvo of noisy mirth. "You're a card, Mr. Pillsworth!" he howled. "You sure are a card. When it comes time for me to cash in my chips, I hope I'll have the nerve to crack jokes like that."

All the way up the trail to the brink of the cliff, Marc had continued to call vainly for George, and the joke, as far as Pete was concerned, was beginning to wear thin.

"Can't you stop that?" Pete asked. "It kinda gets on a guy's nerves after a while. If it means so much to you to have that dog around, why don't you just whistle?"

"I don't feel like whistling," Marc said irritably. "I mean George isn't a dog. He's . . . a . . ." He glanced over the edge of the cliff, and his legs suddenly turned to sawdust. Yards and yards of nothing at all stretched out endlessly downward. He turned pleadingly to Pete. "Now, listen to reason, Pete. I don't want to commit suicide. That was all a mistake . . ."

"You told me not to listen when you started talkin' like that," Pete said doggedly. "I gotta do the honest thing, Mr. Pillsworth. I gotta bump you off."

"Do you *have* to be so honest?" Marc asked desperately. "Don't you want to get ahead in your chosen profession? Haven't you any ambition at all? A good crook would automatically go back on his word, just as a matter of principle. Think of your future, Pete. Where's Marge? She'll tell you."

Pete shook his head. "Marge is takin' it easy back at the lodge. She says we're goin' straight, and I'm to do exactly like you said." He stepped back and motioned toward the edge of the cliff with his gun. "Now, why don't you save us both a lot of trouble and just step off that there cliff? That way, I won't have to shoot you off. I'm goin' to count three, and if you ain't jumped yet, I'll shoot."

"No, Pete!" Marc cried. "No! You don't understan . . ."

"One."

Pete took a step forward and Marc edged back a little. He didn't dare look behind him. The edge of the cliff was only inches away.

"Two."

Pete advanced again, and Marc nervously sidled to the left. Then a look of hopelessness swept over his face. Closing his eyes, he turned and faced the cliff. Waiting for the final, fatal number, his body was tense as a steel spring.

PETE raised his gun level with Marc's back and opened his mouth, but neither the gun nor the mouth spoke. Julie, a piece of paper clutched tightly in her hand, had suddenly appeared on the clearing at the top of the cliff. At the first glimpse of Marc, poised on the edge of the cliff, she stopped short, her lovely tear-stained face suddenly twisting with horror. Then she closed her eyes and screamed with all her might.

As the noise stabbed through the mountain air, Marc started as though

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he'd been kicked. Then, clutching his middle in a gesture of mortal pain, he teetered drunkenly on the brink a moment and . . . plunged downward.

Footsteps sounded on the trail, and Dr. Polk, breaking through the clearing, ran breathlessly toward Julie. Reaching her, he placed an enquiring hand on her arm. Julie instantly opened her eyes, stared at the empty space where Marc had been and screamed again. She started to run forward, but the doctor caught her and held her back. She whirled angrily toward Pete.

"Why did you let him do it?" she screamed. "You just stood there!"

Slipping his gun into his pocket, Pete stared at her stupidly. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "Seems like he just wanted to do it."

With a gesture of hopelessness, Julie turned back to the doctor and buried her face in his shoulder. "It was all my fault," she sobbed. "I drove him to it. And he was sick, too!"

"Julie!"

The voice was from beyond the cliff. Also, it seemed to come from beyond the grave. There was a distant otherworld quality about it.

"Marc!" Julie broke away from the doctor and ran swiftly to the edge of the cliff. Kneeling, she peered anxiously over the side. Not more than three yards below, spread eagle over the face of a sloping rock ledge, was Marc. He was clinging tenaciously to a small bush that had grown into the side of the cliff, and his feet were braced securely against the jagged protruding edge of the ledge. Though he could probably have remained there for days without any real danger, his upturned face was filled with undiluted terror.

"Julie," he cried weakly. "For the love of heaven, get me out of here. I've been shot."

After Dr. Polk and Pete, with the babbling moral support of Julie, had managed to haul Marc back over the edge of the cliff and convince him that he was not riddled with bullets, they left him lying on the ground. Julie knelt beside him and took him in her arms. Pete, after a hasty glance at his resurrected victim, hastily disappeared in the direction of the trail. Probably the apprentice gunman was worried lest Marc demand a refund of the two hundred dollars on the grounds that his services had been incompletely rendered. Dr. Polk, apparently somewhat recovered from his disquieting encounter with Toffee, stood by, observing Marc with unashamed directness.

"It's all right," Julie cooed comfortingly. "Everything is going to be all right . . . even if you are crazy. I'll stick by you, darling. You'll have the loveliest padded cell that money can buy. I'll take care of you." She held him a little way out from her. "You mustn't ever do anything like this again. When I found that note in your room, I nearly went mad myself."

"Could . . . could I see the note?" Marc asked weakly.

JULIE reached into her pocket and held up a crumpled piece of paper. Her hand had perspired and smeared the writing until it was completely illegible, but there was no doubt that the handwriting was Marc's . . . or an exact duplicate.

"But we don't want to see any more of that hateful thing," Julie said. She crushed the paper into a ball and hurled it over the edge of the cliff. "There, now, that's all over, that silly business about you killing yourself." She drew Marc closer to her.

Over Julie's shoulder, Marc glanced uneasily at the doctor. It seemed this was not quite the time for an observer. But the doctor was no longer interested

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in the reconciliation. Instead, his gaze was riveted on the trail. Marc's eyes automatically followed the doctor's, and the hair at the back of his neck began to bristle. Toffee, her filmy skirts held well above her knees, was running toward the clearing as fast as her decorative legs could carry her. Marc stiffened in Julie's arms.

"What is it, dear?" Julie asked.

"No . . . nothing," Marc said faintly. Toffee, by appearing just at this moment, could easily set matters back to where they were in the beginning. Something had to be done . . . quick! Marc's hand started forward in a gesture of warning, but in moving upward from the ground, it brushed lightly against a rock. And there it stopped.

As Marc's hand closed over the rock, his eyes clouded with pain. It was the only effective way to get rid of Toffee quickly. It had to be done. His hand moved upward, poised the rock squarely over his head, then quickly released it. Whack! It was a case of pinpoint bombing. Marc slumped in Julie's arms.

"Oh, dear," Julie murmured concernedly. "He's passed out again." She started to massage Marc's wrists. Then, noticing the trickle of blood over his left eyebrow, she added another; "Oh, dear!"

"Oh, Lord!" Dr. Polk breathed, and his voice was far more earnest than Julie's. Staring at the place where Toffee had been, he seemed almost in danger of bolting over the face of the cliff in a fit of terror. "She's gone!" he cried. "She just melted into nothing!" Avoiding the spot where Toffee had last stood, he edged cautiously toward the trail, and reaching it, broke into a dead run toward the lodge. He ran like a man possessed.

Not conscious of the doctor's odd behavior, Julie gazed softly into Marc's unconscious face. "I'll take care of you," she whispered. And slowly she lowered her lips to his.

BUT in the tranquil valley of his own mind, Marc was concerned with other lips . . . the very singular lips of Toffee. One arm still around his neck, Toffee leaned back and smiled.

"Another day," she sighed happily, "another dilemma. You do live such a rapturous life. Never a sane moment."

"It has never occurred to you," Marc said dryly, "that you contribute somewhat to that insanity yourself?"

"Me?" Toffee asked, wide-eyed. "How can you say a thing like that? I'm always the one that has to straighten everything out."

"I suppose you were on your way to straighten things out when you ran out on the cliff. If Julie had seen you she'd have tossed me over the brink again."

"I was on my way to save your wretched life," Toffee replied haughtily. "I cornered Marge back at the lodge and made her tell me the whole story. She thought you were already dead, but I knew you weren't. If I still existed, you did too. So I ran up there to stop Pete from killing you. Now I get blamed."

Marc took her hand in his. "You were wonderful," he said sincerely.

"You bet I was," Toffee said self-righteously. "It was that fiend, George, that caused all the trouble."

Marc had almost forgotten the ghost in the excitement of the last half hour. "That demon! First I couldn't get rid of him, then when I wanted him, he wasn't anywhere."

"Of course not. George went back to . . . well, wherever he came from. Remember how he disappeared at the table?" Marc nodded. "Well, George did his swan song right there."

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"What!"

"Sure. Because of that fortune-teller," Toffee explained. "It was the simplest thing in the world. She said it was written in your hand that you would live a long time. Well, George believed her. And if you were going to live, he had to get going. That's the rules, and he's a stickler for the rules. And it's only natural that George believes in fortunetellers. He's very superstitious, you know. After all, he's a ghost, himself, isn't he?"

"I see," Marc murmured wonderingly. "Then George is gone for good."

Toffee nodded and began to laugh. "You remember how that jug lurched about when George disappeared?"

"Uh-huh. What's so funny about that?"

"George," Toffee giggled in a fit of hilarity, "tried to take it with him."

Marc started to laugh too, then stopped. The earth was moving away from under him. Either that, or he was rising lightly in the air. Whichever it was, only he, himself, was affected by the phenomenon, for Toffee remained on the grassy knoll. He reached down toward her, but she only smiled up at him.

"It's all over," she called. "Goodbye. It's been lovely being with you again. Don't forget me."

Marc tried to force himself downward, but he couldn't. His will was too weak against the force that was lifting him. When he stopped trying, he shot upward all the faster. Moving away into the distance, he looked regretfully back at Toffee, a tiny waving figure, now, in the soft loveliness of the valley.

"Goodbye!" he called. "Goodbye!"

Then, looking up, he saw the darkness racing down to meet him. He felt a little sad at leaving Toffee and the valley, and yet it was comforting to know that in a few moments he would be back in Julie's arms.

THE next morning the sun glinted brightly over the hood of the blue convertible, then flashed against its rear bumper as it left the graveled drive of Sunnygarden Lodge and turned onto the pavement of the highway.

Behind the wheel, Marc, with an impressive-looking bandage over his left eye, glanced uneasily at Julie, who sat rigidly upright in the opposite corner of the seat. Marc wondered how he could reassure her. Probably the truth about Toffee and George would be worse than nothing at all when it came to restoring her confidence. Maybe just some nice, intelligent conversation . . .

"What . . . what happened to that nice fellow, Dr. Polk?" he asked rather stiffly.

"I really don't know," Julie said, careful that her gaze remained on the scenery along the road. "He left without a word early yesterday afternoon."

That took care of that. A heavy tide of silence washed between them and bore the conversational topic of Dr. Polk away, beyond recovery. Marc hummed self-consciously to himself for a moment, then, in desperation reached toward the car radio and switched it on. Presently, a sonorous voice broke dispiritedly through the silence.

". . . in Europe," it said. "And now for the news, here at home. Probably the most provocative story of the day concerns the psychiatrist, Horace D. Polk. It seems that Dr. Polk, in a state of acute agitation, turned himself in for psychiatric treatment at his own clinic late last night. The doctor claims that overwork had caused him to be the victim of hallucinations that take the form of scantily clad women who suddenly appear, wink at him, and vanish

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into thin air. Before being taken into the care of one of his associates, the doctor told newsmen that his patients would be notified that any diagnosis pronounced by him within the last two months should probably be disregarded. He said that such people would be advised to place themselves in the hands of other, reliable doctors until his recovery. Dr. Grimes, a long-time friend and associate of Dr. Polk, stated that the clinic . . ."

Marc quickly turned off the radio, pressing his lips tightly together to hold back the mirth that was bubbling inside. He turned cautiously to Julie. She was looking at him now, and the twinkle that always foreshadowed laughter was in her eyes. Then, she edged closer to him, and suddenly they both began to laugh in the same instant.

Marc's laughter rang out, clear and unrestrained. Everything was all right again. He reached an arm around Julie and drew her closer. Yes, sir, everything was perfectly all right.

* * *

IN A faraway time and space, on a drifting world of vagrant mists and shrouds, five strange figures had drawn together on what appeared to be a shapeless chunk of steam. Reclining in various attitudes of majestic ease, they seemed happily unaware that, by human standards, their physical contours left something to be desired. For reasons known only to themselves two of the party had seen fit to dispense entirely with the customary appendages, and were lounging in armless and legless splendor on their paunchy stomachs. Two others, even less ambitious, manifested only bulbous heads that terminated in trailing vapors. The fifth was merely a torso, or at least, a simulation of what the torso thought a torso should be.

In the foreground, fidgeting guiltily, George stood before them, his head bowed in an attitude of abject contrition.

From one of the five . . . it would be difficult to say which under the circumstances . . . a low rumbling voice issued forth. Really more of a sound than a voice, it seemed to produce only guttural snorts rather than words. It appeared to be saying:

"Spectre, George Pillsworth, the Council finds much cause for displeasure in your report. It is in fact, severely distressed over the whole matter. It would seem that you have gone to extravagant lengths to make us the laughing stock of all limbo."

George slowly raised his head. His eyes, the eyes of Marc Pillsworth, looked pained and darkly apprehensive.

"But, my lords," he pleaded, "what was I to do?"

"Do?" the voice thundered. "You were supposed to haunt the environs of your subject in a business-like and orderly manner, befitting an agent of the High Council. It seems that it was too much to ask. The only mortals you frightened even a little were two office girls who quite rightly mistook you for nothing more than an unscrupulous employer displaying his lower impulses. You may as well know that the Council is considering an action that will remove your ectoplasm credits permanently . . ."

"No!" George cried. "It wasn't my fault . . . after all, the deceased refused to yield. These mortals can be unreasonable creatures when . . ."

There ensued a short series of rumblings as various anatomical fragments made brief appearances on the steam beds, then as quickly vanished. After an abrupt silence the ominous clearing of a throat sounded from a source im-

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possible to ascertain.

"Hmm. Yes . . . . There ARE extenuating circumstances . . . for which you may consider yourself fortunate, and hummph, from which we may still be able to salvage some slight measure of respect from our allied departments. Perhaps the blame can be laid at the door of the bookkeeping section, if you . . ."

A tiny gleam of hope crept timidly into George's eyes as he nodded in vigorous assent. "I have my release," he offered eagerly, "signed by the section head."

"But!" the voice resumed, "that does not explain your irresponsible conduct, or the disgraceful affinity you displayed for alcoholic beverages!"

George's head slumped dejectedly to his chest again, and he stared into the bottomless regions beneath him. Then he started visibly as he noticed that the gaseous substance upon which he was standing was no longer secure beneath his feet. Already, it had grown thin and unsubstantial and he was beginning to sink downward till his legs were obscured almost to the knees. It was apparent that his worst fears were being realized and he was being sent into—

"Wait! My lords! I admit my conduct was contrary to all the fine traditions of haunting . . . but I'll never touch a drop again . . . not for a thousand years!"

George's voice echoed away, and his feet stopped slipping. With another series of low rumblings, the voice spoke again:

"The Council is inclined to accept the penance you have imposed on yourself. There is the proviso, however, that the other departments must receive no inkling of this scandalous affair. Agreed!"

George's head bobbed up and down in such energetic agreement that it seemed almost in danger of becoming dislodged from his neck.

There was an abrupt sound. A loud clap that may have been thunder. The steam beds expanded, billowed outward, then faded away. From somewhere, it seemed a long way off, a voice was heard to say: "Council dismissed!"

And George, finding himself alone, dissolved his ectoplasm and sat down with a troubled sigh. Absently, he scooped a handful of steam cloud from the small embankment and tossed it lightly out, into space.

He would need a long time to ponder the narrow escape he had just had. Then, too, the fact that Marc Pillsworth, through his unreasonable obstinance, had nearly wrecked his career, was not a matter to be dropped without serious consideration. And beyond that there was also that shrewish little creature who called herself Toffee. Toffee. Yes, a singular creature indeed. He wondered what department she worked under. To be sure, she was a nasty tempered little package, but her legs were nice, and her figure . . . He wondered, musingly, if someday they might meet again . . .

COMING NEXT MONTH:

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RECORDS OF EARLY ECLIPSES

By FRAN FERRIS

IN THE days of early civilization, eclipses of the sun and moon were regarded with terror and wonder. Many thought they meant a war or pestilence and even the end of the world. The earliest record of an eclipse is found in the Chinese annals. The Shu King, or Book of Historical Documents, tells that Hsi and Ho, the hereditary astronomers, neglected their duties, spending their time philandering and drinking in their private cities. The king, Chung K'ang, sent the Marquis of Yin with an army to punish them. The marquis addressed his troops saying that the two astronomers were unaware that "the sun and moon did not meet harmoniously in Fang." This was interpreted by Chinese scholars to mean the marquis was sent to punish Hsi and Ho because they were drunk and failed to observe an eclipse. There is some question as to the date of this eclipse but astronomers think that it took place in 1952 B.C. In Babylon, from the time of Nabonassar, 747 B.C., a dated canon of eclipses was kept. The most famous of ancient eclipses took place in 585 B.C. According to Herodotus, the Medes and the Lydians, who had been at war for many years, felt that the phenomenon was a sign of heavenly displeasure, so they called a truce and a peace treaty was signed immediately. An eclipse of the moon on March 1, 1504, was the means of saving the life of Christopher Columbus. At that time he was on the island of Jamaica, and the natives had refused to supply him and his company with food and they were faced with starvation. Columbus knew that the eclipse was due, so he sent word to the natives that he would blot out the moon unless they would supply the food. So when the eclipse began, they were terrified and promised him all the food he needed if he would only restore the moon.

HYPNOANALYSIS

By PETE BOGG

WOULDN'T it be wonderful if you could remember everything you had ever seen, heard, or read! As a matter of fact, you actually do. Few people realize that all human-beings, even idiots, have perfect memories. Your subconscious mind has made a permanent record of everything that has ever happened to you since the moment you were born. Under hypnosis adults can remember and describe things that took place in early childhood or even in infancy.

Many people are prejudiced against hypnotism because they think it has something to do with "animal magnetism," which dates back to the days of Dr. Mesmer, who centuries ago discovered a way to cure disease by suggestive power, which was known as Mesmerism. Others think of hypnotism as a vaudeville stunt or a parlor game for those who like to appear spectacular. There are others who are convinced of its therapeutic value, but distrust the procedure because it might be unscrupulously exploited. In spite of these unwarranted attitudes of prejudice and fear, hypnotism is becoming quite important in coping with the alarming increase of psychosomatic ailments, consisting of physical disabilities, mental disorders and criminal behavior. Emotional disturbances are usually the roots of crime. Criminality is a sign of immaturity and a criminal is a person who has not grown up emotionally. The reason for this immaturity is usually due to some emotional shock which occurred during early childhood. This sort of psychological chafing in the unconscious emotional area of the brain causes chronic mental conflicts, which frequently find release in some form of physical disability, mental disorder or other abnormal behavior.

Psychoanalysis is a psychiatric method of exploring the unconscious mind in search of an emotional fixation that is arousing memories and causing too much tension energy. These treatments sometimes have to last years before they can find the root of the trouble.

Hypnoanalysis is a shortcut for discovering the emotional trauma, or shock causing the psychosomatic illness whether it be physical, mental, or criminal behavior. Sometimes the trouble can be cleared up by bringing the unconscious mental conflict into consciousness and reason after the underlying complex has been exposed through hypnoanalysis.

Most everyone has been marked emotionally by some frightening experience in early childhood. Emotional shocks may occur as early as the moment of birth. People in general would enjoy better health and contentment, for there would be less strife and more peace in their hearts if the practice of hypnoanalysis were as common as vaccination.

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THE MIRACLE OF HERBERT PLUNK

by RICHARD CASEY

Herbert Plunk came to the city expecting magical things to happen. So he brought some magic with him . . .

IT ALL started in Morse's Restaurant on a rainy afternoon in March. I had rushed over from the office and ordered a beef sandwich with lots of gravy. Sue, the waitress, brought my order. In the next booth a familiar voice droned on and on until I started paying attention to it. I recognized the voice as belonging to Peter Flemish, that young man about town who's personality is so fascinating that he talks about himself most of the time.

I finished eating and went back and sat down beside him.

"Hello, Walt," Pete said. "Say, meet Herbert Plunk, my cousin. He comes from the Thumb."

The Thumb was that part of Michigan that sits among the Great Lakes with its fingers lost in a mitten that points at the Straits. Herbert Plunk looked as though someone had just dragged him out of the woods and forgotten to comb the birds out of his hair. He was a big, raw-boned fellow with a red face, square shoulders under a red and black woolen shirt, and a lot of good-natured, if slightly uneasy smile.

He held out a paw and squeezed mine until it hurt. He rolled the word "Hello" out of his mouth as though it were a hot potato.

"Any friend of Peter's is a friend of mine," he said.

I hadn't heard that corny line for a long time, but I could tell that Herbert Plunk really meant it. He owned honest blue eyes, a little vacant maybe, but *honest*. His carrot-colored hair was stiff. It didn't go where he combed it. He wore blue canvas pants and his long underwear showed at the neck, above the plaid shirt.

Just the same, I liked him.

"Glad to meet you, Herb," I told him. "Has Pete been talking you crazy?"

"Nope," Herbert Plunk said. "Nope, I like to hear Pete talk. He knows all about everything."

I looked at Pete and he winked back. It was a slow, wise wink. I was beginning to get the drift. After you've known Pete Flemish as long as I have, you know he can't leave a guy alone. He's the greatest practical joker in the world, and he'll try anything to hand you a kick in the seat of the pants.

"Oh?" I said. "What's Pete been telling *you?*"

"All about Dee-troit," Plunk said.

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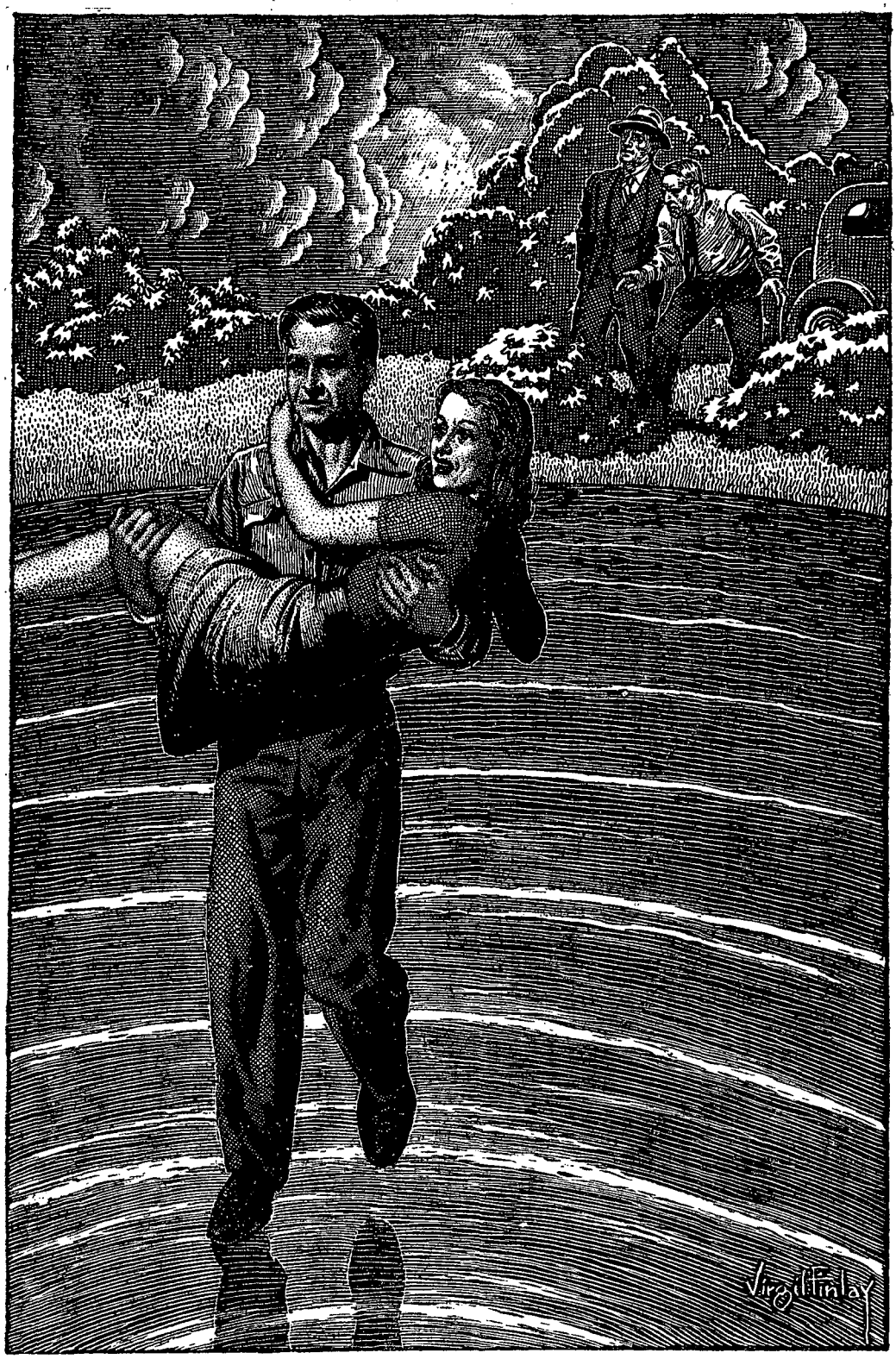

He didn't seem to be aware of anything—he just kept walking across the lagoon . . .

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"Gosh, I ain't ever been down there before. Always stayed around home."

"Oh?" I said again.

"Yes," Pete Flemish said, "I was telling Herb all about the Graham Building. Honest, Herb doesn't believe that people work in buildings that high. He's never seen one more than two stories high."

I'LL admit that he amazed me. I didn't know there was anyone left who hadn't seen or at least heard of a skyscraper.

"Don't you read the papers, Herbert?"

I guess I hurt his feelings, and it made me feel cheap. I don't like picking on a fellow. I guess I was caught off guard.

"Me? I can't read," he admitted. "Pa runs a country store and I never got any education. I always worked in the woods. Pa says I'm the dumbest guy in the world. Say, Pete says there are elevators that shoot up in the air so fast you can hardly catch your breath."

I wanted to get out of there. I didn't want to have any part in the educating of Herbert Plunk. It didn't seem right. Here was a sincere, groping mind and I wasn't going to help fill it with knowledge. I had to treat him right, though.

"The Graham Building is fifty stories high," I said. "The express elevators go all the way to the top without stopping."

His mouth opened.

"Tell Herb about the gravity situation, Walt," Pete Flemish urged. "I was explaining that the gravity is so light on top of the building that a guy can jump maybe forty feet in the air."

Herbert looked at me.

"Ah?" he said, "You—can't?"

Pete looked very grave.

"See, Walt," he said. "He doesn't believe me. How can I teach him anything? He doesn't trust . . .",

"Sure I do," Herbert Plunk interrupted eagerly.

"But—" I gulped.

"As you get closer to the ground," Pete Flemish hastened to add, "the gravity gets thinner. The lower you go, the harder you fall."

I don't mind a joke, but I was fed up on this.

"You ought to go to Detroit yourself, Herbert," I said. "See for yourself. Don't listen . . ."

"Oh, but I could listen all night," Herbert cried. "Me, I got plenty to learn. I *gotta* learn. I'm dumb, like I said. Pete, do you think we could maybe go to Dee-troit?"

Pete Flemish was fast with his tongue.

"Walt's driving down tomorrow," he said. "We'll go along with him."

"I planned on taking Mother," I said. "The coupe . . .?"

"Forget it," Pete said. "We can all squeeze in. Me, I'd like to meet Harriet Graham again. Now, *there's* a girl."

Harriet Graham was *definitely* a girl. She was the daughter of Walter Graham, who owned the Graham Building. I had almost sold an insurance policy to Walter Graham. Pete Flemish had been in Detroit with me at the time. He met Harriet. He hadn't forgotten her.

Incidentally, she had given him the brush-off, but that didn't trouble Pete. It's a long story, and doesn't fit here. Anyhow, Pete Flemish, Herbert Plunk and I drove to Dee-troit.

"That's an elevator over there," Pete pointed to the line of doors along the side of the lobby. The place was impressive. Waxed inlaid floors, expensive marble wall and well uniformed attendants. The Graham Building was

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making a lot of money for its owner. I had a policy in my pocket written up in his name, for twenty-thousand dollars.

Herbert Plunk had put on a suit consisting of huge black and green squares. His shoes were polished like two P.T. boats at anchor in the sun. He wore a straw hat. He said:

"Which elevator is the express?"

Pete pointed.

"That one," he said. "Let's go up on the roof."

I'd rather have avoided that trip.

"I've got an appointment with Graham," I said hurriedly.

"At ten," Pete reminded me. "It's twenty minutes yet. You'll have time. Besides, I want Herbert to try out that gravity."

Herbert's eyes were shining. He edged to the elevator. I felt like a father who was about to prove that there was no Santa Claus.

"Okay," I said, "but don't blame me if this whole thing backfires and hits you right between the eyes, Pete Flemish."

Pete chuckled. His skinny, shining face was a reflection of the fun he was having.

"I don't think *he'll* give us any trouble," he said.

Herbert didn't even know what we were talking about.

We all went into the elevator. Herbert took a deep breath and hung on to my arm. The car shot up. I heard Herbert sigh and felt his grip tighten on my arm. Then we stepped out on the roof of the building.

It has one of those balconies built above the roof with a fence around it so no one will fall off. It was a nice day. You could see the river stretched out like a black ribbon below, and the bridge pointing at Canada like a tiny arrow.

Herbert Plunk said nothing. He just stared. After a while, when he had looked all around, he turned to Pete.

"You think they'd let me jump?"

Pete's eyes twinkled. I went over by the rail where I couldn't hear them. I didn't want to be close to Herbert Plunk when he found out about gravity. I heard Pete say:

"Sure, take a deep breath and jump straight up. Don't get too close to the rail."

Then I was out of hearing, staring down at the street below. I could practically *hear* Herbert take that deep breath. Then a second passed and another. I was counting them. All of a sudden, Herbert gave out with a delighted yelp. Pete was at my side, holding on to my arm, gasping for breath.

"MY GOD," he managed to breathe. *"Walter, he did it."*

I pivoted and looked at Herbert. He was standing there with a big smile on his face. Even Pete is going nuts, I thought. Herbert looked very, very pleased with himself.

"Walter," Pete Flemish was saying, and he shook from head to foot. "I watched him. *He did it.*"

"You're nuts," I told him.

Pete steadied himself. He walked slowly toward Herbert Plunk.

"Do it again, Herbert."

"Someone will see and think I'm just a show-off," Herbert protested.

"No," Pete said in a reverent voice. "There's no one up here but us. Do it again."

I can't believe it. I can't—not even now. But I swear it's true. Herbert Plunk took a deep breath and leaped into the air. He went up like a balloon, floated there at the top of his leap and sank back down again, light as a feather. At the highest point, he was a good fifty feet from the floor of the

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balcony.

"Gee!" he said. *"That's* a lot of fun."

I held onto the railing. I tried to clear up the things in my mind. Somehow, Herbert Plunk had done the impossible. He had produced a miracle from what would have been a practical joke. He did it, and it wasn't even written in the books.

Pete Flemish came to my rescue. He pulled me away from the railing.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "I couldn't stand it—not again."

We went down. I didn't dare look at Pete. I was having quite a struggle of it. Plunk and the elevator operator were very calm. That was because Plunk and the elevator boy hadn't seen or done anything unusual. They were both living, what to them, was a sane and normal life.

PETE FLEMISH was too badly shaken to treat Herbert Plunk with anything but the greatest dignity. Herbert had taken on a new meaning to both of us. I didn't know just how to class him. Either he was as dumb as ever, or he had been blessed with the power to perform miracles. Either way, I didn't like it.

In the lobby, we met Harriet Graham, and her father, Walter. They remembered me, as I had visited them twice before. I had to introduce Herbert. Pete took care of his own introduction.

"I've been wanting to see you again, Miss Graham," he said.

Harriet was one of those slightly built girls, with nice skin, and all the needed qualities to bring home a decent husband. She wasn't highhat, but she did have a certain dignity that rebelled under Pete's whiplash methods of courting.

"Glad to see you again," she said, and then turned to me. "Father and I will be upstairs. Won't you and Mr. Plunk come up right away? Oh, yes, and Mr. Flemish?"

She flashed a nice smile at Herbert Plunk and for the second time that day I came close to fainting. Herbert Plunk's face turned beet red. He muttered something under his breath and twisted the straw hat beween his fingers.

"Yes, come up with us," Graham said. "I have a few moments to spare."

So, that was that. Herbert stood beside Harriet in the elevator and he told her what a big, dumb goof he was and how flattered he was to meet such a beautiful girl. She just smiled and smiled. I was busy keeping Graham in the policy signing mood, and Pete Flemish was just a skinny little guy without a smile, who came along for the ride.

I went into Graham's private office when we got up to the sixth floor. In twenty minutes he had signed the proper papers and I was outside, looking at a little group who sat in the fancy reception room. Harriet Graham was all big-eyed and serious and Herbert Plunk was telling her how he and his Pa killed a whole barn full of rats last fall by pushing a hose under the floor and connecting it to the exhaust pipe of his Ford.

Pete Flemish was sitting a few chairs away, staring at the ceiling. He looked unhappy. I finally collected them, said good-bye to Miss Graham and led them both down to the lobby and out to Woodward Avenue.

We didn't talk much until I hailed a cab and took them back toward the hotel. Then I said:

"My business is all done for the time being. I'm ready to wash up and check out at the hotel. Might as well head for home."

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Not Herbert Plunk.

"Nope," he said. "Nope, I can't go yet. I'll have to stay here. I'll hike home, tomorrow night."

Herbert had me stumped. I looked at Pete and he grinned. It was a wry grin.

"Herbert," he said sourly, "can't go home because Miss Graham is very fascinated by him and they have a date for tonight."

I said:

"Is that it, Herbert?"

His face got very red again.

"I—guess so," he admitted.

I'll admit that I liked it. I liked seeing Pete Flemish getting kicked around. He had tried to put Herbert on the spot, and the tables were turned all the way over.

I said:

"If that's the case, I'll wait over a day. We'll start in the morning. That okay with you, Pete?"

It wasn't. I knew it wasn't because his face was a sort of pale-green color and his fists were clenched.

WE SAT around in the hotel room. Herbert took three showers, got out a clean pair of long-handled underwear and put them on, and spent two hours making himself look exactly like Herbert Plunk, man of the woods rather than of the world. All the time, Pete Flemish sat there reading the paper and not saying anything. I knew he was doing a lot of thinking.

Finally I had enough of Pete Flemish's sulking. I said:

"There's nothing wrong with a fellow taking Harriet Graham out, is there, Pete?"

To my amazement, he grinned suddenly.

"Sure isn't, not if he knows how to impress her," he admitted.

I watched him narrowly as he went to the window and stared out. Herbert had overheard his remark. He looked at Pete for a while. Then he said:

"Look, Pete, you ain't mad about anything, are you?"

Pete gave him the big grin.

"Me? Mad? I should say not. I hope you can make a big impression on her, that's all."

Herbert looked baffled.

"I ain't used to taking out girls," he said. "She's—pretty nice. I don't guess she thinks I'm very much. She's good to me because I'm lonesome."

"That isn't it, at all," Pete protested. "Look, Herbert, I'm going to put you wise to something. Guys like you have to do something that will make girls like Harriet Graham remember them, like that trick I learned about walking on water."

This was it, I thought. I ought to put Herbert straight right now, but I was still a little sorry for Pete Flemish. He *had* fallen for Harriet Graham and, besides, it was none of my business. Between Herbert and Pete, it was sort of in the family. I kept my mouth shut. Not so, Herbert Plunk.

"People don't *walk* on water?" he said, and his eyes popped.

"Not everyone," Pete agreed. "You got to know where and when. What if you picked Harriet Graham up and walked right across the lake with her. She wouldn't forget *that*, would she?"

Herbert didn't find words. He just shook his head.

"Okay," Pete said in a business-like voice. "Now, I'm your cousin and I want you to win. There is a certain place and time. Belle Isle will be all right. The lagoon, exactly at midnight. Right about then, the water is calm enough and the lunar pull is strong. With the help of that moon, you can walk right across that lagoon without even sinking an inch."

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Herbert couldn't express any more amazement. His mouth and eyes were both open so wide now that they weren't capable of going wider.

"Gee," he breathed. "Thanks, Pete. I don't know how I can thank you. Golly, Walt, Pete's about the smartest guy I ever heard of."

I didn't express myself. I was waiting.

"I'd try to do as much for *any* guy who was trying to date Harriet Graham," Pete admitted.

"You sure would," I said under my breath. *"You sure would."*

The moon was big and round and it turned Belle Isle into a silver paradise. The night was quite cool and few people were around at that hour. Against my better judgment, I had followed Herbert Plunk for the past two hours. I was driving the coupe and Pete Flemish sat beside me, seemingly unable to stop chuckling.

Harriet Graham was driving her father's car. She had taken Herbert to a nice restaurant for dinner and Pete and I had stayed on their trail, sitting behind them at the theatre. Now Herbert Plunk was evidently giving her instructions, for we had followed them across the Belle Isle bridge and they were parking ahead of us, at the edge of the lagoon.

"Hold it," Pete warned me. "Turn out your lights. They might see us."

I drove silently under the low limbs of a willow and stopped the motor. Herbert and Harriet Graham didn't seem to want to get out of the car. I figured that maybe Herbert was finally getting some sense. Then without warning, the door of the car opened and they got out.

They walked across the grass arm in arm, and stood there looking down at the lagoon. Suddenly Herbert scooped the girl up in his arms and went down the bank like a horse heading for the water tank.

I heard Harriet cry out, and Pete, at my side, was laughing loudly.

"This is gonna be good," he said in a voice strangled with laughter. "Oh, boy, this is gonna . . ."

His voice halted abruptly, and at the same time I rubbed my eyes with my hand and looked again.

THERE was Herbert, on top of the water, and Harriet Graham was kicking and crying for him to put her down.

Herbert didn't seem to hear a word. He didn't act as though he was very impressed at what was going on. He just kept walking across that lagoon, *above* eight feet of water, and finally put Harriet on her feet again, after he reached the other side.

Pete was leaning back in the seat, fists clenched, his eyes closed tightly.

"Let's get out of here," he said, and his whisper was as dry as fall leaves rattling in the wind. "Good Lord, Walt, let's get away."

That's the way I felt. We didn't wait to see what happened next. I, for one, didn't want to know.

Herbert Plunk came into my hotel room. He had a big, very pleased grin on his face.

"Hey," he said. "You know what I did last night? I walked right across the lagoon with Harriet. She laughed and cried and laughed again. She didn't know how I did the trick, but I don't think she's going to forget *me*."

I nodded. I had a headache. Last night after we left Belle Isle, Pete and I got drunk. We got *very* drunk and agreed that this morning we would put Herbert Plunk on the train and ship him back to the Thumb where he belonged. Herbert was dynamite and didn't know it. However, this morning

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I wasn't sure what we would do. I wasn't sure of anything.

I said:

"Herbert, you and Pete better have a long talk."

His face clouded.

"Have I done something wrong?"

I shook my head. It felt as though everything inside it was rattling. I groaned, and in the next bed Pete turned over and groaned with me. He awakened. He looked at Herbert for a while, and then said:

"Go away."

Herbert felt terrible.

"Pete," he begged, "Pete, please don't be mad. I done something wrong, didn't I? What did I do, Pete?"

Pete sat up in bed. He held his head in his hands, as though it was going to fall off if he didn't.

"You wouldn't understand," he said.

We all three stared at each other. That made it worse. I laid down and buried my face under the covers. Finally Pete said:

"We—been kidding you, Herb."

"I don't care," Herbert said. "My Pa says I was born to be kidded. I'm a dumb cluck. That's what Pa says. I don't want to hurt you guys. You both been swell to me."

"But we haven't," Pete objected. "We tried to make a fool out of you."

I pushed the covers down and said:

"Leave me out of it, Pete. I'm neutral."

Pete shrugged.

"Look, Herb," he said in a suddenly pleading voice. "You got to do what I tell you. You got to stop doing this impossible stuff."

Herbert sat down on the edge of the bed and looked miserable.

"I didn't do nothing, Pete," he said. "Honest, if I hurt . . ."

"How about jumping fifty feet in the air?" Pete shot at him.

"But—how in the dickens did that hurt anyone?" Herbert wanted to know.

Pete groaned.

"You mean to say you really think *anyone* can do that?"

"Can't they?"

I thought it was time to get into the conversation. I sat up in bed and put my hand on Herbert's shoulder.

"Listen to me, Herb," I said. "Pete told you to jump in the air but it was a joke. It can't be done. Anyhow, it couldn't be done before you did it. Then that business of walking on top of the water. No one could do that. *No one.*"

Herbert said:

"But I did."

He was beginning to turn pale. He kept staring at Pete, and not saying anything else. After a while he croaked:

"You mean it was meant to be a—joke? That I wasn't supposed to be able . . .?"

He stopped talking and there wasn't enough blood left in his face to color it. I nodded.

"It was Pete's idea," I said miserably. "I shouldn't have let him, but I didn't figure it would do any harm. When it *did* some harm, it was too late."

"Yes," Pete said. "We expected you to sink to the bottom of the lagoon. I figured it would fix you up with Harriet Graham. Fix you for keeps."

Herbert stood up. He took a step toward Pete, then stopped. He said in a sad voice:

"You like Harriet, don't you, Pete?"

Pete didn't answer him.

Herbert said:

"I—did all those things and they were impossible?"

I nodded. Herbert swayed and caught the back of a chair.

"My God," he groaned. "And I can't swim a stroke."

He fainted.

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WE HAD a real problem on our hands now. Herbert Plunk wouldn't go outside of the hotel. He went downstairs for dinner the next night. It was the first bite he'd taken since he found out that he was doing the impossible.

You see, Herbert Plunk lost all confidence in himself. We had to assure him there was nothing unusual about walking down to the dining room, or in handling a knife and fork. To make things worse, Harriet Graham called, asked for me, and said she was frightened to death of Herbert and didn't want to ever see him again. Harriet didn't like Herbert's magic touch. He scared her half to death. I had to tell Herbert. I thought he was going to cry.

We got Herbert drunk, slipped him a Mickey and tucked him into bed. Never have I seen a more down-trodden hunk of humanity. He didn't want to live. He didn't hold us responsible for what had happened. He said he ought to be given a kick in the pants for being so dumb. It even made Pete Flemish feel bad, for a while.

Next day Herbert was no better. I called Harriet up that afternoon, but I couldn't clear things up. She didn't have any faith in me. Said that people couldn't jump fifty feet in the air, and if I said so, I was crazy also. She didn't want to see any of us after that. Anyhow, Walter Graham called and canceled the insurance policy and said he never felt better in his life. He didn't need insurance. Not mine, at least.

After all this happened, I held ice packs on Herbert's head and tried to make him feel better. Pete Flemish went out in the afternoon and didn't come back. I didn't trust him. I had Herbert on his feet by evening, but he was shaky. He still didn't think it was any use going on living. All in all, it was a nasty problem.

"Listen, Herbert," I said. "I got it all figured out. Your mother had a lot of confidence in you."

He nodded, sitting there on the bed with his head wrapped in cold towels and following me carefully.

"Yes," he admitted. "Ma was pretty swell. She always said that anything a man wanted to do *bad* enough, he could do."

I was beginning to piece the thing together. I was getting an explanation for the things Herbert Plunk had done, and in a screwy way, it made sense.

"You've always had faith in your mother. You decided she was right. Everything you really wanted to do, you could do if you wanted it badly. Right?"

He just looked blank.

"So there's your explanation," I said.

"Where?"

I spoke patiently.

"It's simple," I said. "To begin with, you didn't *know* that Pete's suggestions were a joke. You thought that you could do what he suggested. You *wanted* to do as he said. You wanted it more than anything else. Herbert, it was *faith* and *sincerity* that made what you did a success."

He nodded, but he wasn't sure.

"Seems like faith is pretty thin to hold a guy my size on top of the water," he said doubtfully.

I agreed with him. I agreed wholeheartedly. At the same time, I had an explanation, and I wasn't going to batter my head apart looking for another.

"Just the same," I said. "If you decide you want Harriet Graham, and want her bad enough, you'll get her. It takes courage and faith in yourself."

He shook his head.

"She's Pete's girl," he said.

I groaned. I was beginning to get fed up on Pete. If you speak of the Devil, they say, he'll show up pretty

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soon. The phone rang and Pete was on the other end of the line.

"Walter," he told me. "I've got a date with Harriet Graham. How about me borrowing ten bucks?"

That really boiled the soup over. I was so angry at him that I could have told him a lot of things that the telephone company would have keenly resented. I told him to go to hell, and I hung up.

THE next two hours were pretty calm. I'm glad they were. Although I didn't suspect it, I needed that rest. I did a lot of thinking about Herbert, and I decided that my explanation had been pretty good. He was a simple fellow, and miracles are usually like that, happening to honest guys like Herbert.

Then the phone rang again and it was Pete. I started to hang up, but he was howling something about:

"Fire—Harriet and her father. Get here—quick. Fire, Walt. Can't you understand?"

"What's the matter with you," I shouted. "Where did you get enough money to get drunk on?"

Then I got him calmed down enough to find out that he had just left the Graham Building and it was on fire, and Harriet and her father were still up there in the office. He was calling from a pay booth across the street. I could hear the fire-sirens screaming on the telephone and I started paying more attention to him.

"They ought to be able to get out of there. It's a big place," I said.

Pete's voice was shaking. He was frightened.

"I don't know," he said. "They're on the sixth floor. The fireman I talked to says the elevators can't go through the blaze. They may be trapped."

He was silent for a minute, then his voice was very low.

"Walt, Harriet really thinks a lot about Herbert. I—I think she loves him, but she's too stubborn and frightened to say so. I—thought Herb ought to come."

That was the first decent thought Pete had ever had. It occurred to me that I hadn't ought to be waiting here—doing nothing. I banged the phone into the receiver and shouted at Herbert.

"Herbert, the Graham Building is on fire."

He sat up in bed and opened his eyes.

"Go away," he said. "Let it burn. I'm sleepy."

I shook him and tried to drag him out of bed.

"Herbert, Harriet is in there. She may be trapped. She loves you, Herbert. Pete just called up. He says he knows she loves you."

He was out of bed, pulling his pants on over his pajamas. He was so excited that he forgot to put on his winter underwear.

"What are you standing there looking at me for?" he shouted. "Harriet's trapped in a fire. We gotta get there."

I didn't remind him that it wasn't news to me. I hurried to catch up with him as he raced for the hotel elevator.

We found Pete standing behind the ropes near the entrance to the Graham lobby. Harriet wasn't in the building. She was in his arms, and he was doing a good job of comforting her. I grabbed Pete's shoulder and said:

"Herbert thinks you lied to him. He'll kill you."

Then Herbert was at my side, looking at Harriet.

"Pete," he said in a slow, deep voice, "you said she was up there."

He pointed up toward the inferno of flame that shot from the building.

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"She was," Pete said. "Honest to God. The firemen just brought her down."

Harriet turned and looked at us. Pete hadn't been lying. Her face was streaked with smoke. She was crying. When she saw Herbert, she pulled away from Pete and folded up in Herbert's arms.

"Oh, Herbert," she sobbed. "Dad is up there. He's trapped."

Pete was talking.

"Mr. Graham is trapped in his office. Can't get out. One of the firemen managed to get Harriet. He went back for her father, but the ceiling of the outer hall had burned through. Stuff fell down and kept him from getting to the office."

Herbert was looking down at Harriet and I guess there was a lot of stuff going through his head.

"Walt," he said, "you told me if a guy had enough faith, and wanted to do something bad enough?"

I shook my head.

"I don't know, Herb," I said. "I could feed you a lot of lies. I don't think I want to. Not any more."

His eyes were pleading. He knew what he wanted to do. He didn't quite dare. Harriet stood away from him a little, her hands still in his.

"Don't do it, Herb," Pete said suddenly. "My God, not that. It's hotter than hell in there. You'd burn before you went ten feet."

I hated to say what I did. It took more courage than anything I'd ever done.

"Herb," I told him, "you know what I said about wanting to do something bad enough?"

He nodded, his eyes on me.

"Well, I haven't got the courage to do it. I don't have the knack of performing miracles. Maybe you have. In India, there are men who can walk on live coals without burning themselves. I don't know how they do it."

He let go of Harriet and put his hand on my shoulder. He stared into my eyes as though seeking something he could distrust.

"You ain't lying, are you, Walt?"

"I don't know how they do it," I repeated. "They probably have a trick. They go through flames without feeling them."

"Walt," he said, "you're not lying, *are* you?"

"I'm not," I said.

"Then I want to do it and I can," he said, and went away from there so fast that I hardly knew what had happened.

When I saw him again, he had pushed a half dozen cops out of the way and was disappearing into the lobby.

HARRIET and Pete stood there looking at me without saying anything. More fire sirens were howling and a lot of people were screaming and shouting at each other. A couple of firemen followed Herbert Plunk into the lobby. After a couple of minutes they came out again.

I felt like a murderer. Pete had played practical jokes on Herbert Plunk, but never anything like this. Never—murder.

I didn't move or look at Harriet Graham for maybe four minutes. Then someone let out a loud cry of hope. I pivoted and looked upward where fire shot out from the sixth floor. My heart did three complete handsprings, and I let out a choked yell.

Then someone called:

"Get the ladder. Get the net."

And suddenly the pane of glass in Graham's office crashed out and there was Herbert Plunk standing on the ledge with Walter Graham's limp figure in his arms.

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He was magnificent. He was like Nero with Rome burning. He was like Superman fighting the elements. Herbert Plunk. Miracle Man, Herbert Plunk. The flames shot out the open window behind him, but he stood erect, holding Graham against him, his head held high.

Then the net was in place and Herbert took a deep breath. I think I could even see his chest swell. He jumped. He jumped without fear or hesitation, straight into the net six floors below.

At that moment, it was Herbert Plunk who performed miracles. Herbert himself, was a miracle. He was wonderful, unafraid, triumphant. No flame could sear him as long as he firmly believed that he could come to no harm.

I went back home the next day. There wasn't any point in waiting for Herbert. He was planning on marrying Harriet that week-end. Mr. Graham was safe, but he had been burned and was badly frightened. Before I left Herbert Plunk's Dee-troit, I made arrangements to prepare policies for Graham. I think Herbert had a hand in it, because Graham said I was going to handle *all* his insurance after that. He started with fifty thousand dollars. There were some fire premiums also that would help me plan a nice future.

Well, Herbert got married all right. He didn't try any more stunts. He wasn't sore at Pete, either. Harriet and Herbert built a nice lodge up north and they spend their summers there. They have two kids. One of them, at the age of three, is like Herbert. He jumped out of the hayloft door last week, thinking, I guess, that he'd float gently down to earth. He broke a collar bone and was lucky to be alive after the nasty fall.

Evidently the miracles are running out. They don't cover the family. But Herbert isn't discouraged. He took out a hundred thousand insurance just in case he ever got the urge to do something a little out of line, like flying without artificial help.

I don't know. I'm not the kind of guy to turn down business like that, but I wonder if Herbert Plunk *needs* protection. I have the strange feeling that if he wanted to fly *badly* enough, really wanted to stretch his arms into the air and fly like a bird, *maybe he could do it.*

I know I shall never look back upon my life, without remembering with great respect, the miracle of Herbert Plunk.

DEATH BY A BUSHMASTER

★ **By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT** ★

THIS snake, called the "surususu" by the natives of the Amazon, is one of the most deady reptiles. It grows to be twelve feet long, and attacks swiftly if it thinks it is disturbed. Although it belongs to the rattlesnake family, it has no rattles and does not coil to strike. It holds its head and about one third of its body up in a lateral S and comes at its victim already to strike.

The venom of a bushmaster is also more potent. The rattler's poison attacks the blood corpuscles, but the bushmaster has a nerve poison as well. The natives think that the bite also breaks the neck of the victim because the poison paralyzes the muscles and the head rolls to one side. With just one strike the bushmaster pours in enough poison to kill a dozen men. Death comes quickly but with a great deal of pain. There is a fast breakup of the blood, separating the cells from the plasma, and the victim is really sweating blood. Streaky, bloody serum oozes from every pore, mouth and nose, and the same thing takes place internally. The pain is intense till the merciful coma takes over and then gives way to convulsions that immediately precede death.

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Hell Is A Circle

by Lee Francis

James Forham's hell was a circle that began with a missing bottle of milk . . .

ESTHER FORHAM, stout and comfortable looking, a healthy smile on her round face, came out on the small front porch. She drew her robe tightly about her, bent down and picked up the morning paper. Her smile was replaced by a sudden frown.

A single bottle of milk stood on the step. Only *one* bottle of milk. For ten years, two bottles had been delivered each morning. There had been no deviation from this routine—until this morning.

There was no explanation. Just that single bottle standing there without even a note of apology beneath it. She picked up the bottle, and as she did so, noticed the man with the white hair standing out near the walk, leaning on the white picket fence. She wouldn't have paid any attention to him, but it

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The Chief looked down at him with an accusing eye. "So you stole a bottle of milk?" he said sternly

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was very early, and the man was dressed only in a snow-white bathrobe. He smiled at her pleasantly. Odder still, he didn't seem the least bit embarrassed at his strange attire. Probably a new neighbor, out for a very short walk, who hadn't expected to see anyone, or be seen, during his morning exercise.

"Good morning," Esther Forham said, feeling that she *must* say something.

"*Beautiful* morning," he agreed pleasantly. He didn't seem greatly interested in her, she thought, for he added nothing else to the conversation. He turned and walked away down the elm-lined sidewalk toward Beecher Street. He didn't appear again beyond the line of elms. She stared after him, a queer little shiver traveling down her spine. It was just as though he had vanished *into* the elms, for she did not see him again.

With an outraged feeling toward the man and his strange actions, she picked up the bottle of milk and went into the house. The man *might* have stolen the bottle, though for the life of her, she didn't convince herself that he was the type who would do such a thing.

Perhaps she'd better not say anything to James about the man in the white bathrobe. James would be enough upset as it was. *Only one bottle of milk.*

PROFESSOR JAMES FORHAM came downstairs at six minutes after seven. It was customary for him to arise at seven, shave between seven and seven-five, don his robe and appear at the breakfast table promptly at seven minutes after seven.

He did this morning as he had for two dozen years. He lowered his tall, thin frame into his chair, picked up the morning paper and spoke over the top of it.

"Good morning, Esther."

His wife worked swiftly at the stove. Three minute eggs, three slices of toast, buttered lightly.

"Good morning, James."

James Forham glanced at the weather report, cleared his throat and read aloud.

"Reading and vicinity—warm and continued mild. Slight thunder-showers Wednesday afternoon and evening."

His wife had nothing to add to this printed opinion. It came automatically, every morning. It assisted the Professor in choosing his wardrobe for the day. Light topcoat and bowler hat of midnight black, or raincoat, rubbers and umbrella of the same color.

"The eggs are ready, dear," Esther Forham announced.

Something was troubling her husband, however. The single bottle of milk had been placed in the center of the clean tablecloth.

"*Where is the other bottle of milk?*"

His tone of voice would have been greatly enhanced by the swinging of a heavy whip.

"I'm—I'm sorry, James," his wife assured him. "They left only one bottle."

"One bottle?"

Esther Forham confirmed this in a whisper.

"Yes, dear."

Forham came to his feet, his entire body stiffening with rage.

"They will hear from me about this!" His voice sounded strangely like a snarl. "They know I use the cream from one bottle for my coffee, and the other for my cereal. What is the matter with these people? Are they going mad?"

His wife knew that she should agree with him. However, she also knew that *they* didn't know how he used his cream, and that they certainly weren't going mad. They made an honest error, and

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would no doubt correct it tomorrow. She compromised by remaining silent.

Not so her husband.

"This is a fine way to ruin my day," he sulked. "A man spends years in building up his health and disposition, only to have himself crucified by someone's thoughtlessness."

He sat down slowly, ignored his coffee *and* the bottle of milk, and ate his eggs hurriedly, sputtering as he ate.

"What can a man expect from an unruled body of ruffians who try to deliver milk. No consideration for their customers. I'll—I'll . . ."

He never finished his sentence, for his mind told him at this instant that it was time to leave for the college. He glanced at his watch, and cursed because it was late and he hadn't even dressed.

He left the table in a terrible mood, dressed hurriedly and was at the bus stop in five minutes. He forgot to kiss Esther good-bye, which was another bit of routine that made up his day. All in all, things were in a pretty bad state.

However, the bus that stopped at the corner of Beecher and Elm Streets was a trifle late. Once aboard, Forham sighed in relief. The bus would make up the time he had lost. Aside from the bitter taste in his mouth, left by a very bad start, he felt that perhaps all was not lost. The day might, after all, turn out to be fairly decent. Then he remembered the weather report, and the predicted storms. And he had worn his light coat and hat. He had forgotten his rubbers, raincoat and umbrella. No hope. The day was destined to be unbearable.

THE man in the White Robe knocked softly on the ivory gate.

"You're strong enough to push it open by yourself," the page boy in the golden suit said, and made a face at the man in the White Robe.

The man pushed open the gate and went in. There were a lot of ex-mortals in the reception room. They didn't look like a very good crop. He ignored them and went straight into the Chief's office. The Chief was seated as usual, at the ten-foot ivory and gold desk. He was looking over the Earthly Records, and there was a hawk-nosed ex-mortal seated before the desk, his hat held in his lap. Hawk Nose didn't look very happy.

The Chief looked up and smiled. He had long, white hair that looked like the Angel-hair you find on Christmas trees. His beard was well combed and would have been the envy of any mortal who went for such facial adornment. The Chief didn't look as old as he really was, because his shoulders were still straight and wide. He sat erect, and his cheeks were pink and unwrinkled.

"Back already?" he asked.

The man in the White Robe seated himself on a chair that looked like a slice of white cloud, held up by translucent legs.

"Yes. No hurry, though. I've got all the time in the world."

The Chief chuckled. It was a deep chuckle, shaking his stomach.

"You can say *that* again," he agreed. "However, there isn't a bit of information in the Book that will save Hawk Nose here. No sense of prolonging the interview."

Hawk Nose gave a frightened little bleat, but the Chief looked at him sternly.

"You asked for this," he said. "You asked for it by your actions as a mortal. Sixty years ago was the time you should have chosen for a good start. We tried for years to put you wise. Now it's too late. It's up to *him*."

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He pointed to the floor, thumbs down.

Hawk Nose went out, looking beaten and ashamed. The Chief closed the book and turned half around in his chair.

"Okay, what's the dope?"

White Robe grinned at him.

"*Who's* the dope, you mean."

The Chief groaned.

"Every time I send you down to earth, you bring back a whole load of corn like that. I suppose it can't be helped. I sent you down to find a mortal for us to experiment upon. One that needs to be jarred out of the rut. How did you proceed to find him?"

White Robe looked solemn.

"I stole a bottle of milk."

THE Chief sat back and rubbed his fingers thoughtfully through the silken beard.

"Sorry—but I don't get it."

White Robe looked hurt.

"Simple," he explained. "You wanted me to find a mortal who had been pursuing life along a narrow, inhibited path. A mortal who never dreamed of doing anything just because he wanted to do it. A man who had become ugly, narrow-minded, biased, and unpleasant, just because he chose to keep others out of his life, and go along a straight, selfish road of his own making."

The Chief looked discouraged.

"*So, you stole a bottle of milk?*"

"Now wait a minute," White Robe protested. "I went down there and found the man. You said, find the man and we'll turn his little world upside down. We'll make all his straight lines into circles. We'll uproot him from his everyday habits and see what happens when he has to face an entirely new set of circumstances in his daily life. I found the man. Now it's up to you. What difference does it make, *how* I found him?"

The Chief nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "It sounded a bit odd. Let's forget it. You'll get a month vacation for this job."

White Robe sighed.

"I never thought I'd be *glad* to get away from here, but do you know, Chief, it *does* get boring as . . ."

He blushed, and the Chief smiled.

"It gets—boring," he admitted. "How about thirty days on earth. Does that sound good to you?"

White Robe nodded.

"Swell. There are a lot of people I'd like to have see me down there, just for a gag!"

The Chief relaxed, resting his chin on his hands.

"While you're down there, will you keep an eye on the subject we are going to test?"

White Robe groaned.

"A vacation—with a catch to it," he said. "Well, I suppose I *was* asking too much to have thirty days of my own."

He arose, wrapped his robe closely about him and turned toward the door.

"You're not going to be too harsh on Professor Forham, are you?", he asked over his shoulder.

The Chief rubbed his chin.

"That depends upon how he reacts," he said. "What would be Heaven for one man, would be another man's . . ."

He hesitated.

"I know—I know," White Robe said hurriedly. He knew how embarrassed the Chief was, even to *think* of that other word. "Well, Forham is a heel, no matter how you look at him. He's a good victim for the booby-hatch as things stand now. You can't hurt him any."

"You mentioned that he was a professor?"

"Right," White Robe agreed, with his hand on the door knob. "Professor

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James Forham, teacher of higher mathematics."

"And how did you happen to choose *him* for this experiment?"

White Robe pivoted. He looked puzzled.

"Are you kidding? Maybe you never had a mathematics teacher."

JAMES FORHAM rose from his chair and rounded the desk. He glanced at his pocket watch. The students had had three minutes in which to seat themselves and prepare for class. He adjusted his glasses, made sure that the tips of his collar were not folded, and smoothed his coat sleeves. With feet apart at the proper angle, he addressed his class.

"Our problem today will deal with straight lines. We will discuss the simplicity of straight lines, both in mathematics and in everyday life."

He paused, fearing that he had heard several faint groans. He ignored them, proceeding with his explanation.

"Life, to be perfectly satisfactory, must be made up of these straight lines of thought. Do I make myself clear?"

Twenty-four blank faces, staring at him with strained politeness, told him that he had done no such thing.

"For example," he said, "life is made up of a series of starting points and endings. We arise in the morning and go through certain performances in preparing ourselves for the day. If we learn to do the same things in the same order, each day, life is simplified and made easy. Walking this straight line becomes habit. It is a good habit. No waste motion. The end of this first straight line is our arrival at the college."

A hand shot up in the third row. The Professor nodded and a skinny, underfed youth shot out of his chair.

"Like a football game," he said eagerly. "The starting whistle—the beginning of the straight line. The series of plays are the line we follow. The end is, of course, the end of the game."

Professor Forham frowned. He didn't like sports of any kind. Parties and sports took students away from the worthwhile pursuits of life.

"A fair example," he admitted. "However, more to the point, my weekly lecture on mathematics in the auditorium."

Forgetting his subject of the moment, he smiled, and the use of his unexercised facial muscles hurt his cheeks.

"By the way, most of you are planning to attend the lecture?"

No response. A few faint groans. The professor wished he hadn't mentioned the subject. He hurried on with the discussion.

"I am giving my weekly talk. I will leave this room at exactly nine-fifty. I will speak for exactly one hour, return to this room and consume a healthful lunch."

He noticed that the blond in the fifth row was moving about in her chair. She was hiding a grin behind long, white fingers. Forham watched her closely. The boy behind the blond was running his fingers along her neck at the hairline. The professor cleared his throat loudly. It was always the signal of warning he gave before actually pouncing upon his prey.

"Sufficient to say," he went on, "I mention these facts to point out a perfectly planned program of life. No idle pleasures," he gave the blond a hard look, "and no wasted motion. In life, every moment must be used. There is no time for side trips of pleasure, or for loafing on the job."

His voice faded. The blond was giggling behind her hand. The boy behind her was getting braver. The professor's voice arose gruffly.

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"You will read from page fifty in your text. Tomorrow, there will be a written test on the following forty pages."

There came a clearly audible groan, then utter silence. The professor opened his own textbook, seated himself and stared at the pages idly.

JAMES FORHAM left the classroom. Under his arm he carried the ten-page outline of his lecture. He had some nice additions to his speech. Points he had thought of while speaking to the class.

"Life is a straight line," he murmured to himself, and thought what a fine beginning it would make for his lecture. "Birth is the beginning and death—the end. Follow life by the most direct route, without wasted motion, and you will lead a well balanced . . ."

He stopped short, pausing in his walk toward the auditorium. The distance from his room—317—to the auditorium doors, was just forty paces. He had counted them often. Habit told James Forham that he had *taken* forty paces. He turned and his eyes widened.

He was still standing before the door of room 317.

He glanced around him a little fearfully. No one had noticed. Students passed him, going in all directions. They ignored him completely, as they usually did outside him classroom—and for that matter, in it.

There had been a certain lapse of time. He had walked forty paces, or *had* he? He looked quickly at his watch and his face turned a dull crimson.

Everything was wrong. *All wrong.* The watch had stopped. He had looked at it last, at nine-fifty, the precise moment he left room 317. It had been correct at that time. Now the hands pointed at nine-forty-five.

He shook the watch frantically, and held it to his ear. No sound. He made a mental note to rush it to the watch-repair shop during his lunch period. That still didn't account for the apparent loss of time between nine-forty-five and nine-fifty. He decided that he had made an error on that point. Habit, he told himself, held a strong grip on him.

Had he stood before room 317, day dreaming? Had he *imagined* the walk to the auditorium? It was quite possible. Satisfied that everything, except the broken watch, could be explained, he started briskly toward the auditorium.

Automatically he counted the forty steps under his breath. His feet *seemed* to move, and yet, as he turned to face the auditorium doors, there, once more, was the familiar door with the numerals 317 printed on the surface.

He had moved, and yet, he *hadn't* moved. What was this madness? He felt his blood-pressure mount. Intense anger burned inside him. He had the vague feeling that in some way, Esther and the missing bottle of milk were responsible for this. He didn't know why, or how, but hadn't his greeting to Esther, early this morning, started the whole day off on the wrong foot?

As though far away, he heard bells ringing. The bells told him that students were seated in the auditorium, waiting for him to speak to them.

Frantically, he walked toward the auditorium once more. He focused his mind on one thing. *He had to reach those doors.* If it had ever been important for him to exercise perfect control over himself, this was the time for it.

He watched the auditorium doors with narrowed eyes, feeling that they would attempt again to escape him.

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Every muscle in his body was tortured by mental pain. He placed his hand on the wall to guide him.

God grant, he thought, no one will see me in this condition. He was sure this time, that he had reached the doors. Then, there he was again, his lips bloodless, his teeth reflecting in the glass door of room 317, clenched tightly together, like the teeth of a cornered, frightened animal. His breathing was loud and labored. An unreasonable anger filled him. It was the very thought of not being able to keep an appointment that tortured his soul. The idea of some physical defect, paralysis perhaps, keeping him away from his goal.

His fists were clenched. With great effort he tried to run—in the direction of those all important doors. He tripped on something, and fell. Darkness staggered up and engulfed him.

WHEN James Forham struggled to his feet, Esther was standing before him. Her first words were full of fear and concern for him.

"James, you're all right?"

Bewildered, he stared at her.

"Esther! For heaven's sake, the lecture! I couldn't give the lecture!"

Mists cleared from his fogged brain. He was standing in his own bedroom, clad in his night-shirt. He was barefooted and half the bed-clothes were on the floor.

"Why James," Esther Forham gasped. "You've been having a nightmare. You fell out of bed. I came up as soon as I could. You—hit pretty hard."

She seemed to be hiding a smile, and he didn't like that.

"I—was at the college." he faltered. "They brought me home. I was ill. I fainted. Don't hide it from me, Esther. What did the doctor say?"

She laughed aloud, and put her arms about him tenderly.

"Wake up, James. You've had a bad night. You'll feel better after you've eaten breakfast."

Ashamed of himself, he let her go downstairs while he slipped into his robe. Perhaps, he thought, perhaps it was a dream, but it seemed so real. He felt great relief in believing that these things hadn't really happened. He would have been so ashamed if he had actually. . . .

He went down stairs. His head ached fiercely. He had almost convinced himself that he *had* been dreaming, when he stopped short in the open kitchen door.

His eyes focused on the kitchen table. In the center of the table was a single bottle of milk.

"This," he shouted, "is too much. I won't—I can't stand it!"

His wife whirled around, facing him with frightened eyes. Her gaze followed his, to the single bottle of milk.

"Oh!" she sighed in relief. "The milk? James, I'm sorry, but they left only one bottle this morning."

He was shaking from head to foot.

"Again? This is outrageous. I'm going to call the milk company and . . ."

The look on her face caused him to stop short. She was staring at him with frightened eyes.

"Why, James," her voice faltered, "this is the first morning in ten years that the milk man hasn't left two bottles."

She was lying to him. Deliberately lying.

"The *second* time, my dear," he snapped. "The second time in as many days."

He knew at once that he shouldn't have said that. The look she gave him made James Forham lose faith in everything—in everyone.

"James Forham," she said in a de-

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termined voice, "don't you say another word until you're awake. You *must* have had an awful dream. Don't let it spoil your whole day. Don't say anything else until you're awake. Fully awake."

But he *was* awake, he told himself. He wished he wasn't. He almost wished he were dead. He let her hold his chair away from the table so that he could sit down.

He picked up the morning paper. It looked familiar to him. With new dread shattering what little control he had managed to preserve, James Forham glanced at the dateline. It was the same paper he had looked at yesterday morning. He didn't dare tell her. He looked at the weather report. It was the same one he read aloud to her. He put the paper down slowly. He was going to ignore the whole thing. He was going to adjust himself to the new set of circumstances and start anew.

"Esther dear," he said as sweetly as possible, "I'm not hungry this morning. I'll hurry and dress. I'm afraid I'll be late."

She watched him, worried and puzzled by his actions. When he kissed her good-bye he sensed that she was frightened. Of him, or for him? He wondered, as he hurried down the walk.

James Forham was angry and afraid. Afraid of the topsy-turvy world that Esther had become a part of. In some tangled, mysterious manner, his own wife was a part of the web he was caught in. She, and that accursed bottle of milk. He was sure that she had deliberately given him a day old newspaper. Why, if not to further bewilder his already befuddled mind?

He tried to forget yesterday and face today. The bus was late at Beecher and Elm Streets. He gave his lecture—the same one he had given the class before. Promptly at nine-fifty by the wall clock, he started toward the auditorium. Fear oozed from him. Damp, clammy fear that enveloped his soul and clutched at his pounding heart.

Outside Room 317, that paralysis gripped him once more. Professor James Forham never reached the auditorium.

HE OPENED his eyes reluctantly. For the tenth time he had opened them to stare with blood-shot eyes upon the same scene. For ten long days, he had lived over and over, a part of *one* day. He had gone around and around, like a squirrel in a cage. Yet, certain things happened that forced him to remain silent. He didn't trust Esther, and she was the only person he had ever confided in. He couldn't confide in her now, for he knew that she was deliberately playing her part in the game of driving him mad. He had given the same lesson in his classroom, for ten long, torturing class periods. The class acted in the same manner each time. They never questioned him. They never showed the slightest surprise.

Each morning he was confronted by that same bottle of milk and the same newspaper. He had grown shrewd about the paper and the bottle. He never mentioned them now. He never gave Esther the opportunity to torture him by swearing that this was the first morning—the very first, that the milk company had failed to leave the two required quarts.

James Forham was developing a great cunning. He would never let Esther break him down. He faced her innocently, never betraying his true thoughts.

There was no beginning and no end. Each day was a part of the other. He lived them over and over with hellish clarity, knowing each even before it happened, knowing he could never

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break the bond that forced him around the circle, until he discovered the key.

He dragged himself wearily out of bed. In the glass, he stared at the strange, deeply lined face. There were vast splotches of dark skin below the eyes. The eyes themselves were the eyes of a beast. His hands shook when he put on the robe. He wanted to hide in the bed. To crawl back into it and die there, without having to go on.

He couldn't. He had to go down. He had to attempt to follow—the straight line.

"Good morning, Esther," he said, as he entered the kitchen.

"Good morning, James," she said cheerily, and busied herself at the stove.

Three minute eggs and three slices of toast, buttered lightly.

"James," at last. "You don't look well. You'd better see a doctor."

He laughed. He forgot the cunning and reserve that he had built up between them. His laugh was bitter.

When he spoke, his voice was cracked and dry, like an old man's voice.

"You've been telling me that every morning for ten days," he shouted. "Small wonder I don't look well."

She pivoted, facing him with alarm expressed in every feature of her face.

"James Forham, are you mad?"

He brought his fist down upon the table with such force that the cup of coffee spilled and coffee ran across the cloth to the edge. It dripped on the floor. The bottle of milk, *the single bottle of milk*, jumped off the table and settled down again, like a defiant, lasting monument to his insanity.

"I've been having nightmares. Sure, I'm *living* a nightmare. You're a part of that soul-destroying nightmare, do you understand?"

He rose slowly from his chair, clutch-

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ing the edge of the table for support.

"You are an ugly, important part of the thing that is destroying my mind. Esther, I hate you. *You understand that, don't you?*"

He picked up the paper, scanning it as well as he could while it shook in his hands. Date—the same. Weather—the same. He swore aloud and tossed it on the floor.

"You—you devil," he shouted wildly. "You're at the bottom of this—this witchcraft!"

He heard her scream and saw the look of utter terror on her face. Her face was suddenly white as snow, and she cowered away from him. He saw only the ugly, scheming face of the witch he had conjured up in his mind. His brain told him that he must hate something—destroy something, or he would destroy himself. There was no one but her.

His quivering hand reached stealthily for the bottle of milk. His fingers fitted around the neck of the bottle perfectly. The surface was cold, and felt good in his hand. He rounded the table, walking slowly, stealthily, for he wasn't sure of himself any more. Esther backed against the stove, her body arched away from him, lips parted in horror.

"James, you're mad!"

Her voice was a whisper. An imploring whisper. She didn't understand. She—didn't—under . . .

He brought the bottle down with all his strength.

Somehow, it never reached its goal. In mid-air, some great force stopped it. Some force that picked him up and threw him back into the ring—the circle that for a moment he sought to escape.

* * *

He was standing in front of room 317, trying desperately to reach the auditorium.

"Life is a straight line," he kept mumbling to himself. "If I can get back on that straight line. Life is a straight line. There is beginning and end. There is a straight . . ."

He couldn't. He just couldn't walk those forty paces. He would never reach an end. It was all a circle. A circle that was without beginning—or end. Hell was a circle. There could be no worse hell for him—who had walked all these years on a straight, self-worshipping, selfish straight line.

THE man in the White Robe seated himself before the Chief's desk. He wasn't wholly at ease today, for he had returned from thirty days' vacation on earth, and hadn't had a very good time. Finally the Chief closed the Book and stroked his beard. The Chief's forehead was devoid of wrinkles. His voice, when he spoke, was clear and warm with regard.

"Well, so you've come back?"

White Robe groaned.

"With the seniority I have here, you shouldn't have cause to make me suffer any more. I put in my suffering days without complaining to you."

The Chief frowned.

"Explain yourself. You've had thirty days' vacation. You've done what you asked to do—visited earth. Now, what's worrying you?"

White Robe stood up. He adapted the pose of a congressman to whom the world has not been kind.

"That poor damned soul, James Forham. When are you going to put him back on the right track? When does he stop suffering? I watched him wandering around that circle for a month. Even *I* got jumpy. When does he get a rest?"

The Chief sighed and looked pensive.

"When he gets over his selfish, narrow ways and admits that he has been wrong. When he breaks down and ad-

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mits that he isn't right about life, and that all the other people on earth may have a few ideas that have merit."

The man in the White Robe was a little more calm now. He sat down on the cloud-chair and nodded.

"In other words, he's got to holler *Uncle?*"

The Chief said:

"You were a mortal yourself once. You did some things on earth that you aren't proud of. What happened to you when you left there?"

White Robe blushed.

"They sent me to that—that place," he admitted reluctantly.

"Sure they did. You suffered and you were sorry for what you'd done. You were a better man for it."

"I haven't any complaints about the service now." White Robe admitted.

"I know. Yet, in spite of the fact that every mortal gets his share of punishment, you ask me to let James Forham off easily."

"I don't ask any such thing," White Robe objected. "I only asked, how long before he gets his share of punishment?"

The Chief opened the Book and studied it.

"He's getting his—his punishment on earth. Some day he'll see how wrong he is. He'll u n d e r s t a n d that his 'straight line' isn't straight at all. To James Forham, long, endless, tortuous days are passing. Those about him know nothing about his punishment. They are living only one day, while he, in his newly shaped circle, is forced around and around, without end or beginning. Yet, we are being just, because he will be released from that circle when he is ready to get along with his fellow men."

White Robe nodded.

"I wish you'd explained it that way

(Concluded on page 178)

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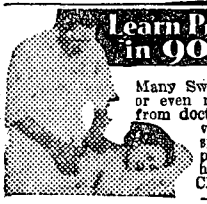

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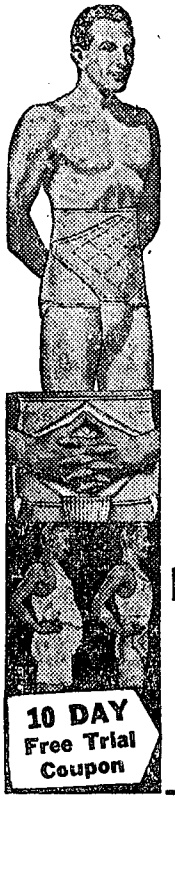

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READER'S PAGE

TOO HIGH AN I.Q.

Sirs:

Orchids to you for putting FANTASTIC ADVENTURES back on a monthly schedule.

I have just finished reading your September issue, and I find that you have, as usual, maintained your literary integrity, as well as scientifiction superiority.

"The Children's Room" by Raymond F. Jones was quite well done, but I fear that the author was over-zealous in his attempt to portray the exceedingly high intelligence quotients (i.e. Walt's I.Q. of 240) of the mutant children. According to "Developmental Psychology" by Professor F. L. Goodenough (Appleton-Century Co. Inc., New York), 1945, page 374: "The distribution of I.Q.'s for the total population on either of the two Stanford Revisions of the Binet Scale which, by most authorities, are regarded as the most adequate of the tests at present available, covers a range approximately of 200 points, from very close to zero in the case of the profound idiot to approximately 200 I.Q. which represents the highest level thus far reported by any competent examiner.

"—I personally do not know of any instance of a 'genuine' Stanford-Binet I.Q. higher than 200, and I know of but one child who reached that level." With the exception of Raymond F. Jones' apparent carelessness, the September issue was very well done. Keep up the good work!

Louie Kopeny III
2741 N. Mason Ave.,
Chicago 39, Ill.

The 200 I.Q. rating, as you say, is the basis for determining the I.Q. of humans as we know them. But would such a scale be adequate in determining the I.Q. of a mutant? Obviously not. A mutant might have an I.Q. as high as 500—or possibly more. Who can tell? Thus Mr. Jones' figure is not entirely unreasonable.....Ed.

VON COSEL'S STORY WELCOMED

Sirs:

Congratulations on getting von Cosel's story. I didn't know that Mr. von Cosel was still living, having heard nothing about him since 1940.

We must admire a man who can go through misunderstanding and persecution with no more bitterness than von Cosel seems to harbor.

I'm afraid that our mental attitudes haven't changed much since the Middle Ages; anyone today who puts a foot off the "established" paths of science and learning is liable to be the object of a witch-hunt. Fantasy and science-fiction magazines are doing a lot for the cause of open-mindedness—and just look at what a tough time they had at first!

Conrad R. Marron,
868 Fifth Avenue S.,
Glasgow, Montana.

We think you've got something there.....Ed.

GONE BEYOND THE VEIL

Sirs:

Your September issue of FA merits mention. I think I'll bind it with a stiff back cover and place it with Charles Fort in my library. I call the whole number the "Shroud Collection of Beyond the Veil." By the way—why not publish another fantasy book besides FA?

No doubt your bread and butter depend on throwing firecrackers for bug-eyed minds who still rejoice in calamities, so persons who are like I am can't expect to escape scot-free from their scathing rebukes if this letter is published. After all, we owe it to them for the existence of such a Forum or Arena for other gladiators from other realms than the "cloud-cuckoo-land" as Miss Elaine Scott of Boston so aptly puts it.

One call tell by their letters they are good sports and usually settle down with grim good-will while a writer like Raymond F. Jones spins the jewel called: "The Children's Room." By far a masterpiece of daring flight from smug confidence in present-day science. I'll keep it among my treasured souvenirs.

By the way, Mr. Palmer, your name is sort of a catalyst between Manly Palmer Hall and Raymond F. Jones. Perhaps there is something in names after all. Am I right?

Douglas Hugh,
P.O. Box 6273,
Metropolitan Sta.,
Los Angeles 55, Cal.

You count the rebukes, Doug, and let us know. And thanks for the compliment on names, but we're afraid we'll just have to remain a catalyst and not the real thing.....Ed.

A BIT TOO MORBID

Sirs:

I've read your September issue of FA and I found one thing wrong with the story, "The Secret of Elena's Tomb." That is, Mr. von Cosel wrote a bit too much about blood and mummifi-

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cation. That's a bit too morbid for me!

Now, I liked "Come Along With Me" by S.M. Tenneshaw. Give us readers pleasanter stories like that one. Also, "The Children's Room" was very entertaining. The rest of the issue was just fair. Thanks for listening.

Mrs. George Zanof,
1449 Larimer St.,
Denver, Colo.

Sorry you thought the von Cosel true story was a bit too morbid—but that's one of the funny things about real life . . . but you can rest assured we'll have a lot more stories of the type you like in coming issues.....Ed.

PRAISE AND CRITICISM

Sirs:

First of all, I enjoyed the novel in the September FA very much. While the fantasy was held down to a minimum, it still had enough of it to make it worthwhile. There were passages in it that reminded me of Wells. Put me down as one who enjoyed the "Secret of Elena's Tomb."

"The Mad Scientist" was an excellent satire. It's nice to see a Bloch story that is not a Lefty Feep. More like it.

"The Children's Room" was great. There was some real style in that one.

"Once to Die" has been done many times before and better.

"The Shroud Sewers" was delicious. You've been giving us too little of Livingston, by the way. He's one of your best writers.

"Come Along With Me" was fair. The cover was good too. It caught the mood of the story.

Glad to see the letter column enlarged. Which reminds me, I have a bone to pick with you. A few years back you had a darned good reader's page. Then the war came along and you had to cut it down. Now that it is slightly enlarged again, the letters have not been up to standard. And another thing. You used to print letters that both praised and criticized the stories. Where are they now? It seems a letter has to be completely rosy before you accept it. Why?

Well, anyway, I'm glad that FA is back on a monthly schedule. Maybe it will be like the "good old days" from here on in. Get McCauley back. He was a darn good cover artist. Rod Ruth is your best interior artist. But keep guys like Finlay, Krupa, and while you're at it, get us another novel by Robert Moore Williams. And oh yes, what ever became of the back cover?

Jack Clements,
6310 Madison Rd.,
Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

Well, Jack, we print the letters as we get them, and as we have room for them. We don't cut out pan letters—we welcome them. That's how we find out just what you readers like. As to McCauley, he had a cover on the July issue—remember? And we'll tell Bob Williams to get busy

(Continued on page 176)

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SON OF THE SUN

By ALEXANDER BLADE

(SEE BACK COVER)

WE ARE already here, among you. Some of us have always been here, with you, yet apart from you, watching, and occasionally guiding you whenever the opportunity arose. Now, however, our numbers have been increased in preparation for a further step in the development of your planet: a step of which you are not yet aware, although it has been hinted at frequently enough in the parables of your prophets, who have garbled whatever inspiration they have been able to receive. Sometimes they were ignorant. Sometimes they were unable to translate clearly the concepts implanted in their minds. Sometimes they were cautious, and to insure the preservation of the information they wished to place upon record in the world, they spoke in metaphors and symbols.

We have been confused with the gods of many world-religions, although we are not gods, but your own fellow creatures, as you will learn directly before many more years have passed. You will find records of our presence in the mysterious symbols of ancient Egypt, where we made ourselves known in order to accomplish certain ends. Our principal symbol appears in the religious art of your present civilization and occupies a position of importance upon the great seal of your country. It has been preserved in certain secret societies founded originally to keep alive the knowledge of our existence and our intentions toward mankind.

We have left you certain landmarks, placed carefully in different parts of the globe, but most prominently in Egypt where we established our headquarters upon the occasion of our last overt, or as you would say, public, appearance. At that time the foundations of your present civilization were "laid in the earth," and the most ancient of your known landmarks established by means that would appear as miraculous to you now as they did to the pre-Egyptians, so many thousands of years ago. Since that time the whole art of building in stone has become symbolic, to many of you, of the work in hand—the building of the human race toward its perfection.

Your ancestors knew us in those days as preceptors and as friends. Now, through your own efforts, you have almost reached, in your majority, a new step on the long ladder of your liberation. You have been constantly aided by our watchful "inspiration," and hindered only by the difficulties natural to your processes of physical and moral development, for the so-called "forces of evil and darkness" have always been recruited from among the ranks of your own humanity—a circumstance for which you would be exceedingly grateful if you possessed full knowledge of conditions in the universe.

You have lately achieved the means of destroying yourselves. Do not be hasty in your self-congratulation. Yours is not the first civilization to have achieved—and used—such means. Yours will not be the first civilization to be offered the means of preventing that destruction and proceeding, in the full glory of its accumulated knowledge, to establish an era of enlightenment upon the earth.

However, if you do accept the means offered you, and if you do establish such a "millennium" upon the basis of your present accomplishments, yours will be the first civilization to do so. Always, before, the knowledge, the techniques, the instructions, have become the possessions of a chosen few: a few who chose themselves by their own open-minded and clear-sighted realization of "the shapes of things to come." They endeavored to pass on their knowledge in the best possible form, and by the most enduring means at their command. In a sense they succeeded, but in another sense their failure equalled their success. Human acceptance is, to a very large extent, measurable by human experience. Succeeding generations, who never knew our actual presence, translated the teachings of their elders in the terms of their own experience. For instance, a cross-sectional drawing, much simplified and stylized by many copyings, of one of our traveling machines, became the "Eye of Horus," and then other eyes of other gods. Finally, the ancient symbol that was once an accurate representation of an important mechanical device, has been given surprising connotations by the modern priesthood of psychology.

The important fact is, however, that we are here, among you, and that you, as a world-race, will know it before very much longer! The time is almost ripe, but as with all ripening things, the process may not be hurried artificially without danger of damaging the fruit. There is a right time for every action, and the right time for our revelation of ourselves to your era is approaching.

SOME of you have seen our "advance guard" already. You have met us often in the streets of your cities, and you have not noticed us. But when we flash through your skies in the ancient, traditional vehicles, you are amazed and those of you who open your mouths and tell of what you have seen are accounted dupes and fools. Actually you are prophets, seers in the true sense of the word. You in Kansas and Oklahoma, you in Oregon and in California, and Idaho, who know what you have seen: do not be dismayed by meteorologists. Their business is the weather. One of you

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says "I saw a torpedo-shaped object." Others report "disk-like objects," some of you say "spherical objects," or "platter-like objects." You are all reporting correctly and accurately what you saw, and in most cases you are describing the same sort of vehicle.

The "golden disk"—now confused with the solar disk and made a part and parcel of religion—even in your own times. The "discus," hurled sunward by the Grecian—and your own—athletes. The "eye of Horus," and the other eyes of symbology, alchemical and otherwise. Our mechanical means of transportation.

Now that the art of manufacturing plastic materials has reached a certain perfection among you, perhaps you can imagine a material, almost transparent to the rays of ordinary visible light, yet strong enough to endure the stresses of extremely rapid flight. Look again at the great nebulae, and think of the construction of your own galaxy, and behold the universal examples of what we have found to be the perfect shape for an object which is to travel through what you still fondly refer to as "empty" space.

In the center of the discus, gyroscopically controlled within a central sphere of the same transparent material, our control rooms revolve freely, accommodating themselves and us to flat or edgewise flight. Both methods are suited to your atmosphere, and when we convert abruptly from one to the other, as we are sometimes obliged to do, and you are watching, our machines seem suddenly to appear—or to disappear. At our possible speeds your eyes, untrained and unprepared for the maneuver, do make mistakes—but not the mistakes your scientists so often accuse them of making.

We pass over your hilltops in horizontal flight. You see and report a torpedo-shaped object. We pass over, in formation, flying vertically "edge-on," and you report a series of disk-shaped, platter-like objects, or perhaps a sphere. Or we go over at night, jet-slits glowing, and you see an orange disk. In any event, you see us, and in any event, we do not care. If we chose to remain invisible, we could do so, easily, and, in fact, we have done so almost without exception for hundreds of years. But you must become accustomed to our shapes in your skies, for one day they will be familiar, friendly, and reassuring sights.

This time, it is to be hoped that the memory of them, passed on to your children and their children, will be clear and precise. That you will not cause them to forget, as your ancestors forgot, the meaning of the diagrams and the instructions we will leave with you. If you do fail, as other civilizations have failed, we will see your descendants wearing wiring-diagrams for simple machines as amulets, expecting the diagrams to do what their forefathers were taught the completed article would accomplish. Then their children, forgetting even that much—or little—would preserve the amulet as a general protective device—or as an intellectual curiosity—or perhaps as a religious symbol. Such is the cycle of forgetfulness!

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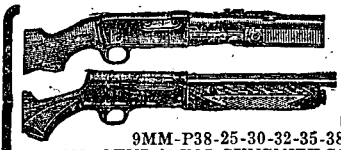

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READER'S PAGE

(Continued from page 173)

right now! And the back cover? Well, just take a look at this issue. How's that for quick service! .....Ed.

HE DIDN'T LIKE "ELENA"

Sirs:

As a fantasy fan of over twenty years standing I must break a pet rule of mine—that of not panning any story I don't like, as others may like it. But "The Secret of Elena's Tomb" is forcing me to break that rule.

Gentlemen, that type of story belongs in either a True Romance, or some other pulp magazine of that type—not as an insult to the intelligence of Fantasy Fans. The standard of FA has always been of a very high calibre, but von Cosel's story had no merit and was strictly not the type that I have come to expect from your publication.

Hyman M. Sachs,
597 Stone Ave.,
Brooklyn 12, N.Y.

Thanks very much for your criticism, and all we'll say is that FA will try to keep up the high standard that all our readers expect.....Ed.

THE STARTLING MR. JONES

Sirs:

Despite the fact that it is not the type of story for which FA is chiefly known, I think that "The Children's Room" by the startling Mr. Jones should receive some sort of an award for excellence and I wish that more of your writers would "do as the Joneses"—at least this Jones. The story was terrific.

Although that novelette made the issue as far as I was concerned, "The Shroud-Sewers" was also a highly enjoyable yarn. Bloch's tale was good too, but hit me a little off center and left me with a feeling of incompletion. "Come Along With Me" was a surprisingly good story, considering the rapidity of its birth, as mentioned in your editorial. . . . I'm trying hard, however, to forget the novel in that issue.

Monthly publication—three cheers!

Ralph Glisson,
542 Prescott Rd.,
Merion, Pa.

We're a wee bit curious, Ralph, about just what you mean when you say the "type of story for which FA is chiefly known." My word, we didn't know we had a type! We've always felt that the author should be able to write a story as he wants to—not necessarily as an editor wants him to. And we welcome stories like "The Children's Room" which you and the rest of our readers have praised so highly. We have no formula or "type." All we look for is a good fantasy story—and it can be as fantastic as the author wants it to be—as long as it is still a good story. And after all, that's what you readers want!....Ed.

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THORNE SMITH AND "TOFFEE"

Sirs:

I've just finished the September FA, and for the first time feel impelled to communicate with you. Foremost, in your reader's page for this issue, the letter from J. H. Clayton was quite bigoted, in my opinion. Thorne Smith was, and is, a favorite of mine. I've read most, if not all of his stories. "Toffee" has only the vaguest, superficial resemblance to the ectoplasmic spirits that haunted Topper. I believe that Thorne Smith himself would have been the first to acknowledge the originality and excellence of Charles F. Myers' stories, and I'm sure he wouldn't object to Mr. Myers' use of his "style" in some places—though I cannot say that I found that to be greatly true in the "Toffee" stories. I think Charles Myers' style is entirely his own.

As to von Cosel's story, I thought it was too morbid, and anyway, I cannot believe his theory that it is possible to bring the dead back to life. Stick to authors like Myers, Williams, Bloch, and all the other regulars.

Charles Sherrill Jr.,
625 W. 164th St.,
New York 32, N. Y.

Your comments on the "Toffee" stories were very interesting, and we might add that we think you've hit the nail on the head.....Ed.

SHAVER IS FINE, BUT—

Sirs:

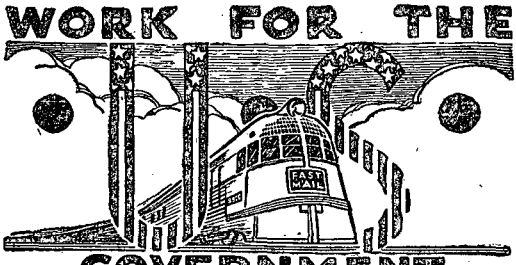
For years I've read science-fiction and fantasy magazines. They have given me the most enjoyable reading hours of my life. FA in particular has satisfied my craving for the imaginative bizarre. I had imagined that most of your fans were of high mental calibre. Then came the Shaver stories.

The stories Shaver writes are fine—I like them. But what I don't like is the fact that both you and some readers seem to believe they contain factual truth. While his stories are good, his ideas are cock-eyed, and couldn't possibly be so. I read for enjoyment—only. If this keeps up I'll have to start a "Stop-Shaver-Club."

Paul W. Dyer,
2 Amory Place,
Cambridge, Mass.

Well, at any rate, Paul, you do like Shaver's stories. That's the main thing—to satisfy your reading tastes. And don't worry about whether they are true or not—if you think about it too much maybe you'll start hearing voices—and you wouldn't want that to happen, now would you? ..... Ed.

P.S. But seriously, belief is a funny thing. There are many people who believe every word in the Bible, and just as many who think every word is false. This holds true too about the Shaver Mystery. A great many people feel that parts or all of the Shaver Mystery answer experiences that they have had themselves. So who is right?..Ed.



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"'Don't do it, John!' she said. '*Please* don't! For the first time in our lives, we're really saving money. It's *wonderful* to know that every single payday we have *more* money put aside! John, if we can only keep up this saving, think what it can mean! Maybe someday you won't have to work. Maybe we can own a home. And oh, how good it would feel to know that we need never worry about money when we're old!'

"Well, even after she got better, I stayed away from the weekly poker game—quit dropping a little cash at the hot spots now and then—gave up some of the things a man feels he has a right to. We didn't have as much fun for a while but we paid our taxes and the doctor and—we didn't touch the Bonds.

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HELL IS A CIRCLE

By LEE FRANCIS

(Concluded from page 171)

before I took my thirty days off. I'd have pitied him less and enjoyed myself a lot more."

The Chief's eyelids raised slightly.

"You could have chosen your own time. You could have spent those thirty days on earth by the mortal calendar, and never known anything about James Forham's month of torture. Perhaps you'd rather live on earth for a while?"

"No, no," White Robe explained hastily. "This is okay for my money. It's tops. I wouldn't trade places with anyone. This is kinda new, though, this idea of punishing Forham. To me, a straight line is a straight line, and a circle—a circle."

"That depends on how you look at it," The Chief explained. "To a person as narrow-minded and self-centered as Forham, a circle is pure, undiluted. . . ."

The Chief buried his face in the Book, without finishing the sentence.

"*That word*," White Robe muttered. "It's always popping up."

He left the room quietly. He had to open the ivory gate himself, because the golden page boy was asleep in the shade of the ivory wall. Business was pretty slow, White Robe mused. Maybe he'd take a few days off and visit James Forham, if things stayed slack for a while. He wondered idly, how many thousands of years of torture James Forham could live, before he escaped that tiny, tightly wound circle of hell he had fallen into. That, he decided grimly, would be entirely up to the mathematics professor.

THE END

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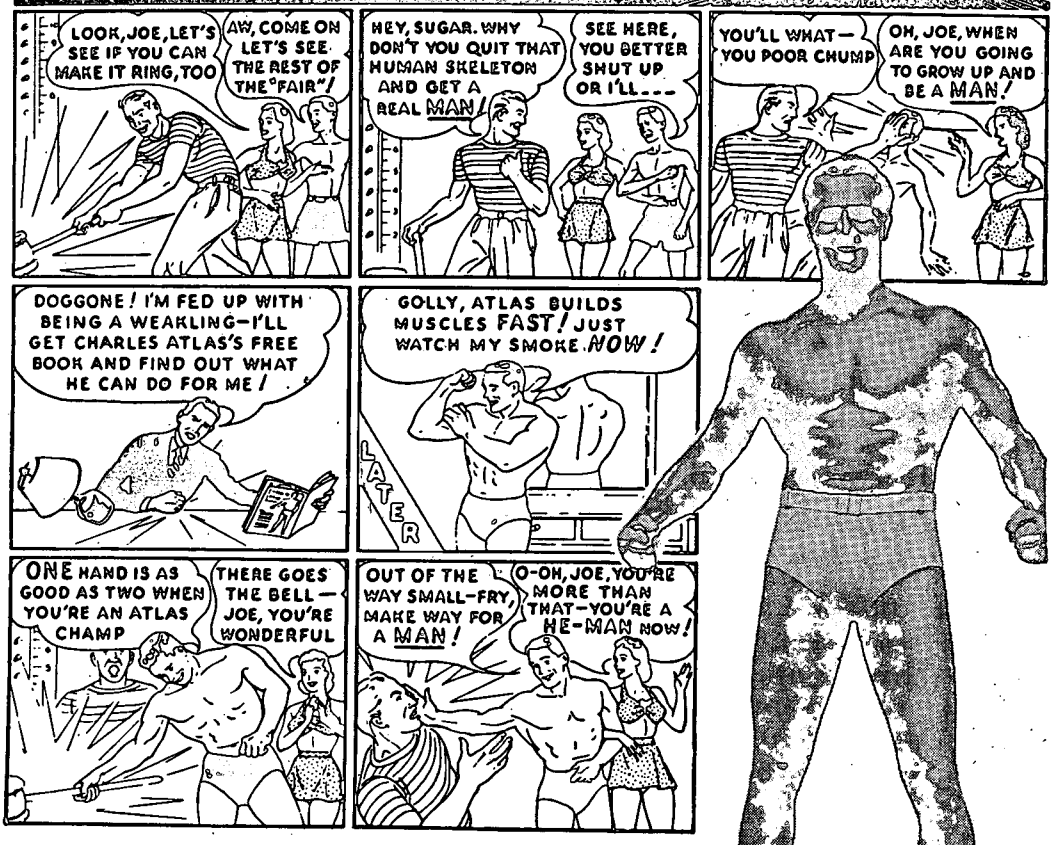

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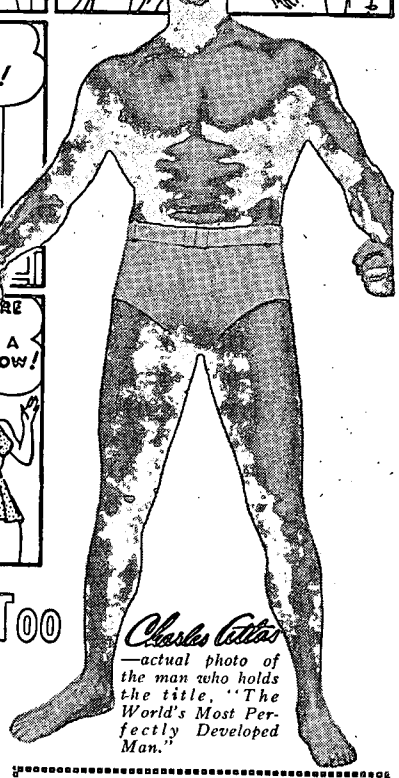

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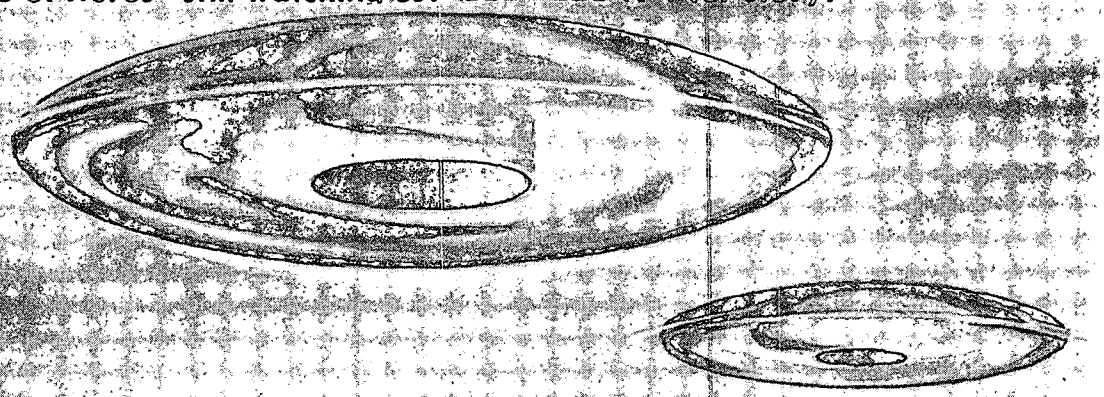
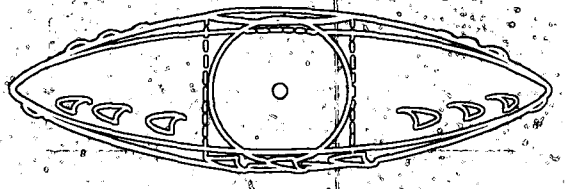
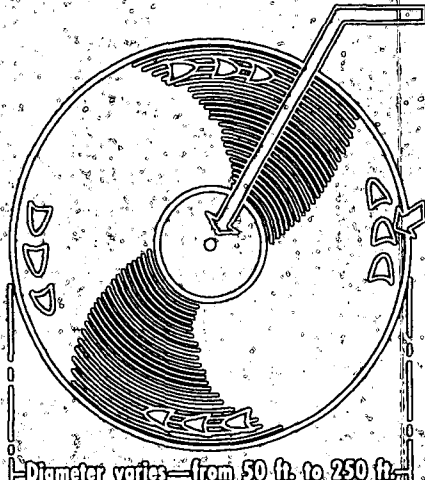
SON OF THE SUN

Will the ancient gods of Egypt and other lost civilizations come back to Earth in time to avert an atom war? Is the "Eye of Horus" still watching us? See page 174 for story.





Control chamber suspended within control sphere. Lens-shaped body transparent to visible degrees of spectrum, but presenting surface reflections from certain angles as a glass lens does



Centrally placed space-flow drive. Sealed in sphere. Probably the size of a grapefruit

Jet slits can be fired in sequence to produce spin. Can be flown in atmosphere without spinning. Course can be instantly changed in any of ten directions

Diameter varies—from 50 ft. to 250 ft.

Ships can only be photographed clearly with infra-red film

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